

The Good Society

Moral Standards and the current debate on Homosexuality

by Johan D.Tangelder.

In Canada no debate is stirring more passions than those aroused by the controversy over moral standards, and how we can live together with all our differences. Some years ago Saskatchewan's NDP Premier Roy Romanov called for a national debate about "core values." Can we have them without a fixed moral reference against which to judge right from wrong? Toronto Star columnist Richard Gwyn claims that Canadians want their government to establish moral and cultural bulwarks that will define us as a distinct society. But who decides what is moral? Can a government establish moral standards? Should it remain neutral? But neutrality is impossible. Political decisions always involved moral choices. And every choice has an impact on the life of people. Some choices are minor, others crucial. And some choices are not always clear cut. For example, the prosperity of the logging industry or the preservation of a primeval forest is one of them. Governments must make decisions on the information they have on hand. The abortion issue is clear cut as well as what constitutes a family. The government has made moral choices affecting the unborn children and the very structure of society.

Liberal Intolerance

Our governments are guided by liberalism. It is perhaps unfortunate that Canada's federal ruling party is called the *Liberal Party*, since the latter may give the impression that a discussion of liberalism is merely a discussion of the practices and policies of the Liberals. As I see it, the party's name is only a manifestation of an anti-Christian political ideology. At its core is the concept of freedom. Nothing can stand in the way of one's absolute freedom to create the world as he or she wants it. One of the Liberal's favorite slogans is: "We are the party of shared common values. We don't discriminate. We promote the public good." But what is this public good? How is it discovered? Dr. George Grant observes that for liberalism "What matters is that men shall be able to do what they want, when they

want.... ‘Value judgments’ are subjective. In other words, man in his freedom creates the valuable. The human good is what we choose for our good.” This liberal ideology was at work in the same sex bills of the Ontario and federal government. The bills altered the traditional concept of the family. They gave special status to same sex relationships. Homosexual partners want more than tolerance, they want official recognition and they receive it. Opponents are called homophobic, hypocrites, sexist, intolerant and unloving. Many journalists and academics attempt to prove their status by criticizing Christianity. The news media often put Christianity in a negative light. They fall back then on the hackneyed stereotypes of “fundamentalists or “dangerous fanatics” to discredit Christians who dare challenge the liberal view of public good. The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) has allowed radio stations to refer to Southern Baptists as “wackos.” But they ruled against stations that broadcast disparaging statements about “gay science” and “the gay agenda.” But this attitude is a flagrant violation of liberal sympathies that stress multicultural tolerance, pluralistic understanding and mutual acceptance of different views and practices. In his book *A Time for Anger*, Franky Schaeffer aptly defined “liberal” as meaning “an indefinite tolerance of everyone and anything, except those who disagree about issues on the basis of moral principle.”

What is Good?

Do we have the right to create our own values and call good what we choose for our good? A pamphlet funded by the City of Toronto Department of Public Health and published by The Aids Committee of Toronto has gay teenagers say, “For us, having safer sex means feeling good about who we are as gay men.” In a feature article in the *Globe and Mail* (June 11, 1994), gay author and playwright Jerry Bartram declares that being gay is a gift of God, not a curse. And he states, “That gift needs to be acknowledged and proclaimed.” Toronto Star’s columnist Tom Harpur asks, “Why should they (the homosexuals) be forbidden the same physical expressions of tenderness and love most people enjoy, particularly when they do so as a committed, faithful couple?” At this juncture, the question we should ask is, What is good?” We talk about good food or the good weather. The word good can be used in the sense of praising the excellence of something. However, when someone says “he is a good

man” or “she does a good deed” a moral value is conveyed. Can a same sex relationship be called “good?” What are people saying when they call a homosexual lifestyle “good,” or “what I’m doing is okay because it makes me feel ‘good’?” How you answer the question “what is good” depends on your world and life view. For example, the liberal mindset equates “pleasure” or “happiness” with the good. It argues that when a certain act or lifestyle produces happiness, society should approve. Can we be good without God? If there is no God, then what we consider good and how we behave does not have any guiding principles beyond ourselves.

Christian View of Goodness

The Christian view of goodness, of right and wrong, dominated all of ethics and political philosophy in the Western world until humanism and secularism gained strength by the seventeenth century. In the Biblical context the personal, living God who has revealed Himself as love and goodness in Jesus Christ is the lawgiver. The good is what God freely wills and commands. He is the Creator of the moral law, and defines its very nature. He set the rules for right and wrong, good and evil. “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways”(Ps. 25:8).

How do we define good? God alone proclaims what is good. Evil is whatever is opposed to His will and word. The prophet Micah says, “ He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly is to love mercy and to walk humble with your good God” (6:8). The good embraces a peaceful hardworking, honest life (2 Thess. 3:6-15) sobriety, thrift, abstinence, compassion and social justice. The Christian “ brings good things out of the good stored in him”(Matt. 12:35). The psalmist admonishes us to “depart from evil, and do good, seek peace, and pursue it.” (Ps. 34:14) Paul says that God’s law is “holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12), and so is man’s obedience to it. Dr. Carl F. Henry observed, “The performance of God’s Holy will alone constitutes man’s highest good. The rule of life is to ‘seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness’ (Matt. 6:33).” The man who does the will of God is intrinsically good. He believes in moral absolutes that should pervade and impact every aspect of human life and civilization. The Christian view obviously impinges on the liberal view of morality.

Goodness as revealed in Scripture is the only sound basis for our nation without a clear moral vision. As Dr. A.W. Tozer aptly remarked, “That God is good is taught or implied on every page of the Bible and must be received as an article of faith as impregnable as the throne of God. It is a foundation stone for all sound thought about God and is necessary to moral sanity.” When the Bible is no longer accepted as the authoritative norm for morality, moral standards will be based on the shifting sands of public opinion. But when the Bible is the foundation of morality, the sin of Sodom will be seen for what it is - the violation of God’s law. For the Christian then the meaning of “good” is defined by God’s revelation in Scripture, and rests therefore completely and absolutely on His will for our private and public life. God alone determines what is true and beautiful, good and evil. Within this mind we must refute the view of those gay teenagers who say, “for us, having safer sex means feeling good about who we are.” And we must **disagree** with the view that “being gay is a gift from God.” Why? The Bible limits sexual relations to male-female marriage. Homosexuality is wrong and sinful. (Lev.18: 22-30; 20: 20: 13; Rom.1: 24-32; 1 Cor.6: 9,10; 1 Tim.1: 9:ff.)

Public Policy

Historically, politics has been concerned with questions of right and wrong, and it must continue to do so. The primary purpose of public policy is to work toward the common good in a pluralistic society. And public policy must ensure that social values are upheld for the common good. If society determines that certain behaviors are morally preferable to others, public policy becomes a means by which those behaviors are legitimized and deviations from them punished. Hence, homosexual practices should be denied social legitimacy, and public policy should reflect this. In other words, governments should encourage the establishment of permanent, monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Social justice demands that homosexuals - even politically radical ones - be treated with dignity and respect, and their rights be protected. Such protection already existed in law long before the granting of same sex benefits.

What does the goodness of God require of Christians? The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates what is expected of us. It teaches that Christians should also show goodness and compassion to homosexuals with the prayer that they will respond to the Gospel of grace and find forgiveness and

healing in Christ. Our duty then is not only to oppose legitimatization of homosexuality, but also to show God's goodness. Christians are called to act upon the dictates of Scripture, which thoroughly equips the man of God...for every good work (2 Tim.3:17). The heart of goodness then is love that is not puffed up with pride, but exercises gentleness and patience.

Government Interference

The great danger Christians in Canada have to meet is not the danger of violent persecution but rather the crushing of religion by relentless government sanctioned secularism. Today there is no area of life in which federal and provincial governments will not intervene and demand conformity to their view of the good society. They have become the most important institutions for most Canadians. Christians remain free to hold their private beliefs and actions. But they may not put into practice their faith in the public square. For example, when Scott Brockie, who describes himself as a "born-again Christian," refused to print materials promoting the gay and lesbian lifestyle, the Ontario Human Rights Commission told him that he is free to hold his religious belief and to practice them privately in his home. Brockie was told to pay \$5000 in damages to the complainants. His Christian faith was trivialized. His freedom of public expression of his faith was taken away. He was not allowed to oppose publicly the promotion of lesbian and gay lifestyle. The Centre for Renewal in Public Policy rightly comments, "The complete subordination of Brockie's religious views and the utilization of state opposed sanctions to force him to act in a manner fundamentally opposed to his convictions should concern all citizens...A better sharing of the public realm and accommodation of opposing views is called for."

Conclusion

Christians must reclaim the right to have a public faith. We need a democratic debate. There should be no exclusion. A true democracy always takes the minorities into account. There is an urgent need for a rigorous and reasoned public discourse about the moral norms that are the foundation of society. Each faith community, whether Christian or secular, should have the right to sit at the public

policy table. Christianity is not just a set of moral standards, it is a living world and life view that is meaningful for all we do, in every sphere of life. We must be prepared to correct policies in the light of the Bible. Loving God at the deepest level means obedience to His Word. What is the public good and how do we contribute to it? A society which exalts individual choice as the ultimate source of truth undermines the very foundation of democracy. And a Christian who privatizes his faith is in chains, even if he believes he is free. He is then in bondage to the seductive, deadly, secular spirit of our age.