

**Coming Out, Coming Home: A Place in the Church for Lesbians and Gays  
Held at the Center for Action and Contemplation, Abq., NM  
June 27-20, 1997 weekend retreat  
Led by Wendy Corry and Fr. Jack Robinson, OFM**

Excerpt from

**Friday evening talk: Father Jack Robinson (Tape 1, side 1)**

**Robinson reads: ROM 1:25-27 - “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Therefore, God handed them over to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and the males likewise gave up natural relations with females and burned with lust for one another. Males did shameful things with other males and therefore received in their own persons the due penalty for their perversity.”**

“I would mention that St. Paul is far more concerned with idolatry than with particular sexual practices in this passage, especially if you consider the context of what I just read in the argument of what St. Paul weaves together throughout the letter. In the introduction of his letter, which is that first chapter, Paul is stressing the need for knowing the one true God by looking at the results of having other gods, other gods who are no more than idols. Perhaps the most deceptive idol of all is for human beings to hold up a mirror and declare what they see God, to create God in their own image rather than to realize that it’s the other way around, that we are created in the image of God.

“The most obvious form that any “creation” of God can take place among human beings is for human beings to look around and take God’s measure for what appears to be the normal majority of their own group. Thus what is “normal” for the “majority” – and both of those words I have in quotations – what is “normal” for the “majority” of the group becomes what is “natural” (which I also place in quotations). This easy projection of the human into the divine is the greatest danger of having scripture, as we do, which has been forged as a record of the human experience of God. See, because God wants us to come to know God through our experience, we have this great temptation to take our limited experience and project it onto an infinite God.

“By way of an example of both the ease with which this happens and the danger which arises from it, we have to do no more than briefly call to mind the difficulties which have faced every racial or ethnic minority which has ever immigrated to the United States. I do not know of a single minority which was not at one time or another labeled “abnormal” or “unnatural” in some way by the dominant majority.

“What Paul means by “natural” will probably be a point of contention as long as the scriptures are studied. The Greek word which Paul uses here is taken from same root as the word which he uses on seven other occasions. These usages vary widely, but seem, in the main, to have in common the idea of having ‘certain observable attributes as a constitutive element by birth.’ Gentiles do not have the Jewish law ‘by nature.’ We are Jews ‘by nature.’ Gentiles worship things which were ‘by nature’ not gods. And all people are ‘by nature’ children of wrath, that is, born into a sinful world.

“But there are a couple of usages of this word by Paul which don’t exactly fit this pattern. In 1COR 11:14-15: ‘Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory, for her hair is given to her for a covering.’ Nature hasn’t taught me that.

“And in ROM 11:21-24, it is God who acts ‘contrary to nature’ in grafting the wild olive branch of the gentiles onto olive tree of Israel. *God* acts against nature.

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“In no place does Paul state that unnatural intercourse of women involves homosexual, or as it may be more commonly or specifically called, ‘lesbian activity.’ This unnatural intercourse is open to wide interpretation from society to society, and from historical era to historical era.

“For Paul, brought up in rabbinical tradition of his day, unnatural intercourse may well have meant either sex intercourse outside of marriage or sexual intercourse in some way not open to procreation. The Old Testament provided a number of taboos concerning sexual intercourse between men and women which would have otherwise been allowed intercourse including ritual impurity [and?] menstruation. In the latter example, the practice of sexual intercourse while the woman is menstruating is closely linked to the practices of ancient Israel’s non-Jewish neighbors, as is homosexual male intercourse in the same passage. And the primary concern can easily be read as maintaining a separate and distinct identity as well as a self-defined superiority with regard to the tribes which the Israelites, with God’s help, were driving out of the land, which then would become theirs by divine right.

“One way of looking at this in the preceding verses would be to say that just when human thought they had things figured out, that their majority was the measure of all, that nothing more magnificent than a human was possible, that in a very subtle way they could start to make idols out of human beings. God decided that human beings needed a dose of humility. First, there were those who were not like the majority, which was the measure. There may have been women who did not want to have children, who practiced birth control of some sort, who ‘exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.’

“Then there were men who ‘burned with lust for one another.’ If these men truly burned with lust for *one another*, that would hardly raise any problem for those who resembled the normal majority idol, as those members of the normal majority would not be influenced by this lust themselves. Something else was going on as well. ‘Degrading passions and shameful things,’ two terms that Paul uses, reveal more than a theological judgment about orthodoxy. They are words full of emotional content – indeed of prejudice, and hate, and fear.

“If God can ‘hand over’ human beings to something so far different - as homosexual behavior appears to be from that of normal majority behavior of heterosexual procreative activity of that majority - what happens to the image of that normal majority human being as being measure of all things? Being the idol? Are human beings then found to be idols with clay feet in the face of an infinite God, of infinite variety?

“Further, what happens to the masculine image of male dominance, in all matters, including sexual, if there are some men who are willing to be the sexual – and thus seen as submissive or passive – partners of other men? All male dominance becomes questioned.

“Thus Paul makes the point that human beings are not the measure - are not the standard - but God is the standard. In Rom. 3: 22-23, Paul puts it this way: ‘For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.’

“Further, there is no need to suppose a moral condemnation of homosexual in ROM 1:18-32, because the *mere existence* of both homosexuality and heterosexuality in human beings is itself the proof that the mirror image idol, no matter what human being held up in the mirror, is insufficient to reflect the infinite God of creation.

“For Christians, there is one perfect mirror image of God to be found among human beings – the God/Man Jesus the Christ. While Christian tradition in general maintains Jesus never married, Roman Catholic tradition insists on his perpetual, celibate chastity. Little emphasis is given to the radicality. It was *radical* that he was celibate in his own time and place. [Except we have used that ?] celibacy as a justification for maintaining the ecclesial discipline for celibate clergy in Roman Catholicism, a discipline which did not emerge generally until hundreds of years after Jesus and which was not universally accepted in Roman Catholicism till approximately 1000 years after Christ.

“An obvious question presents itself then in the Roman Catholic consideration of sexuality: if the normal majority image of human sexuality - that sexuality is intended only for heterosexual procreation of the

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normal majority heterosexual idol - why did Jesus the Christ, the one, perfect mirror image of God, not marry?

“This question does not require consideration and nothing is being proposed here about sexual orientation of Jesus; but simply acceptance of the idea that he never married and a reminder that Jesus’ own celibacy presents unanswered questions with regard to unconditional Christian acceptance of the heterosexual, normal majority image of human beings as the only acceptable way to be a sexual human being.”