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Regele's "Science, scripture, and same-sex love" (Book Review)

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Critical Review



Regele, M. B. (2014). *Science, scripture, and same-sex love*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 278 pp. \$22.00. ISBN 9781426798290

Within the last decade a societal reversal has taken place regarding homosexuality. The cultural and legal effects have been seismic. Six thousand years of Judeo-Christian morality has been swept aside by the triumph of value neutral scientific modernism and individualistic autonomous post-modernism. The New Morality is now the norm of contemporary life and traditional Christian sexual morality is an archaic tribal anachronism. Gender is now a self-defining choice. Transsexuality is culturally celebrated. All sexual acts exist for personal pleasure only. The self or the collective, but not the Bible, is the center of moral authority.

The playing out of this values conflict is now in full swing within the churches. The biblically traditionalist wings of many mainline denominations have collapsed. One example is found in the homosexual ordinations and marriage rites in the Episcopal Church (TEC). This led to the development of orthodox organizations like the Global Anglican Future Convention (GAFCON) and new traditionalist denominations like the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA). The Presbyterian Church's (PCUSA) acceptance of homosexuality has led to their bleeding membership into other growing Evangelical-Reformed denominations. And rumblings of church conflict are being heard in the United Methodist Church, where the Western Jurisdiction recently ordained an openly homosexual bishop. Mennonite institutions, Goshen College and Eastern Mennonite University adopted pro same-sex hiring practices and left the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. World Vision in the recent past attempted to relax its hiring practices on homosexuality and was forced to backtrack. And once Evangelical icons Tony Campolo, Amy Grant, Brian McLaren, and Rob Bell now all agree that gay is good. This topic is not going away. And every church, parachurch organization, individual Christian, and Christian book reviewer is forced, while being fair and compassionate, to nevertheless, take a side. This reviewer assumes a traditional Christian moral framework.

Rev. Michael Regele, an ordained Presbyterian minister (PCUSA), and father of a partnered lesbian, has composed a well written and well researched text defending covenantal same-sex marriage and the normalization of homosexuality. When his local PCUSA congregation marched away into the morally traditional Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), he took up rhetorical arms. He marshals

his arguments to defend homosexuality, building on a “theology of creation,” citing the contemporary science of “sexual orientation,” and systematically revising the received interpretations of scripture. N. T. Wright’s *New Perspective on Paul* – whether fairly or not – is acknowledged as the hermeneutic methodology for Regele’s deconstruction of biblical tradition. Regele’s argument is open, honest, winsome, and appeals to both reason and sentiment. He gives historical, sociological, and scientific backgrounds to the nature versus nurture origins of homosexuality. Everything is built on contemporary liberal assumptions about science, social science, human nature, human sexuality, which then results in a significant revising of the biblical framework.

The scientific evidence which is used to support his position represents the current secular orthodoxy. For instance, sexual orientation is presented as a type of sexual predestination in which every proclivity toward homosexual feelings are turned into unchosen inevitabilities, which Regele ultimately uses to justify homosexual acts. Yet this principle of unchosen sexual proclivity is never applied fully to heterosexual philandery, polygamy, pedophilia, incest, fetishism, or bestiality. If people have any orientations, are they free to practice them? And is an orientation an absolute that cannot be controlled? Are there degrees of orientation? Certainly one would expect that social science would give us a bell-shaped curve of statistical nuance? And if homosexuality is unchosen, built into the DNA, then why do some come to this inclination later in life? Why does family life and birth order matter? And from a Christian point of view, might any orientation – toward violence, promiscuity, theft, alcoholism, self-centeredness, you name it – represent a permanent cross that particular persons might be forced to bear. If you haven’t noticed, God does things like that. The Christian life for everyone is a constant struggle of cognitive dissonance.

The biblical evidence is even more problematic. His reading of God’s “love, righteousness, and covenant” in Genesis leads him to conclude: “when I reflect on this story and the challenges of homosexuality, I cannot see the condemnation” (p. 29), even though heterosexual procreative sexuality stands as the showcase relationship of the creation ordinance of marriage. The sin of Sodom is declared to be inhospitality, which is in fact true, the homosexual rape of protected guests being the greatest form of social violation imaginable. This same sin almost robbed the tribe of Benjamin in the book of Judges of their right to exist. And the facile arguments about the use of the word “abomination” in Leviticus are touted out; as if a word cannot be used in various contexts with various effects. After a chapter long analysis of the New Testament’s pervasive condemnation of many forms of homosexual behavior, Regele says “one can conclude that the Bible is silent on the forms of committed same-sex relationships that are the center of the modern discussion” (p. 186). The attempt is made to further play the Roman Catholic natural law tradition off against the Evangelical *sola scriptura* tradition: natural law is made

to seem unnatural; biblical law is made to seem unbiblical; reason is made to seem unreasonable; procreative sterility is made to seem a high virtue.

In spite of this negative critique, Christian college and seminary libraries will need to develop their collections on homosexuality from all theological positions. A non-ideological survey of biblical sexuality is found in William Loader's *Sexuality in the New Testament* (2010). Traditionalist presentations on homosexuality are laid out in Robert Gagnon's magisterial *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (2001), Adam Barr and Ron Gitlau's *Compassion without Compromise* (2014), Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality* (2015). Pro-homosexual positions are developed in Jack Rogers *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* (2006), David Gushee and Matthew Vine's *Changing our Mind* (2014) and Lutheran minister Gilbert Rossing's *Dignity, Dogmatism, and Same-sex Relationships* (2009). As the song says, we have only just begun.

One last comparison to the social issue of abortion: whether rightly or wrongly, the moral divide created by homosexuality in the Evangelical culture wars is more divisive than abortion for a number of reasons: First, one can be pro-abortion, even have an abortion, and no one would be the wiser unless one makes it an issue. Second, homosexuality, once in the closet is now out, and requires the church and the individual to take a stand in the public square. Homosexuality in the culture demands obedience to the political powers, neutrality will not be tolerated. Third, state and society will use coercive mechanisms against all who oppose same-sex marriage. A few Christian bakers and photographers have found this out. Many Christian colleges, churches, and parachurch organizations are looking at the legal ramifications of their bylaws for fear of lawsuits, revoking of tax exempt status, or denial of federal loans and grants. The price of dissent in the new social justice order may be joblessness, bankruptcy, and re-education classes. In the battle between first amendment rights and absolute genderless egalitarianism, traditional religious people are currently the losers.

In spite of this polarization, academic Christian libraries are unique in that we are not churches. Our goal is not to keep every book we agree with, but to provide a balanced collection of the best representative titles of theological, moral, political and cultural opinions. It is our task to make this professional neutral task clear to our students, faculty, administration, board and other stakeholders. We need to gather as much academic material on homosexuality in order to support our scholarship and curriculum. This book is certainly one to add as a contemporary statement of the pro-homosexual theological position.

Reviewer

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