

AlbertMohler.com

Homosexuality and Heresy: Liberal Theology Loses its Mind

In this strange postmodern age, heretics find themselves in a very strange predicament. Various skeptics, revisionists, liberal theorists, and atheists have been undermining the faith for more than a century. By this time, virtually every heresy has been expounded by numerous proponents. The creative heretic of the contemporary age has to come up with some new angle or bizarre new theory to promote.

Wednesday, October 15, 2003

In this strange postmodern age, heretics find themselves in a very strange predicament. Various skeptics, revisionists, liberal theorists, and atheists have been undermining the faith for more than a century. By this time, virtually every heresy has been expounded by numerous proponents. The creative heretic of the contemporary age has to come up with some new angle or bizarre new theory to promote.

Nevertheless, never discount the diabolical ingenuity of those who intend to subvert biblical truth and the Christian faith. The latest evidence of the heretical imagination comes from Professor Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. of Chicago Theological Seminary. Just when you think you've encountered just about every possible heresy, along comes something so shocking that it demands painful attention.

In *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives From the New Testament*, Ted Jennings argues not only that Jesus approved of same-sex relationships—but that he was involved in one. Jennings explains that his book, “is an attempt to carefully and patiently explore texts from the Gospels that suggest something about Jesus’ own erotic attachments and the attitude toward same-sex relationships that may be fairly extrapolated from the traditions about Jesus.” He admits that his argument “departs from what has been the norm of discussion.” That qualifies as a disingenuous understatement.

What Jennings proposes is a radical re-reading of the New Testament material in order to claim Jesus, not only as a proponent of the homosexual movement, but as a man involved in homoerotic relationships. He intends to appropriate the Bible for a “gay-positive perspective.”

Of course, the Bible contains explicit statements condemning homosexual activity in all forms. Jennings explains that the biblical material dealing with homosexuality can be reduced to five texts—two verses from Leviticus and three from the New Testament. Liberal theologians determined to find support for theological behavior must deal with these specific texts, and Jennings acknowledges that these texts seem “to require additional work.” Additional work, indeed. What Jennings proposes is to ignore those specific texts and to jump over the entire argument by appealing to an absurd reading of the entire New Testament for evidence justifying homoerotic relationships and attraction.

Jennings, a United Methodist, argues that his approach is “pro-gay” rather than defensive in dealing with the biblical texts. Reading the Old Testament, he finds parallels in the relationship between Jonathan and David or Ruth and Naomi. The biblical texts, he commends, should be read “from the perspective of a contemporary gay or queer sensibility.” He explains: “Here the aim is to discover how the text appears when it is read from a standpoint affirmative of gay or queer reality—that is, what the text means now, when viewed from this perspective.”

Those unfamiliar with the bizarre science of liberal theology and modern biblical studies may be unfamiliar with the way the post-Christian scholars approach the text. Rather than dealing with the text as it is given and clearly intended to be understood, they look for hidden “strategies” by which the text can be read to mean the opposite of what it clearly states.

In describing his methodology, Jennings proposes: “The task of a gay reading thus entails a multiple strategy of interconnected readings of texts. By attending to the distinction between and relations among these strategies, we become better acquainted with the biblical text itself as well as with the varied aspects of liberationists readings generally.” If that sentence makes clear sense to you, you probably need counseling.

That pattern of convoluted argument and excessive verbosity is characteristic of postmodern biblical interpretation. Those who apply these methodologies are not seeking to understand the text itself, but are determined to read their own interpretations into the texts in order to use the text for their own purposes.

Anyone reading the Bible in an honest and straightforward manner will come face to face with the reality that the Bible communicates an unequivocal and clear message concerning homosexuality. The Bible not only condemns same-sex attraction and acts, but also explains that the whole complex of homosexuality is a form of direct rebellion against God’s Word and God’s design in creation. But Theodore Jennings and others like him will have nothing to do with this unmistakable truth.

Jennings teaches at Chicago Theological Seminary in the field of biblical and constructive theology. He is also credited with being a founder of their gay and lesbian studies program. Those programs are deliberate expressions of an attempt to liberate the Bible from its plain meaning and to justify modern ideologies and sexual lifestyles by subverting the biblical text.

But even in this company Jennings presents a radical argument. The concept of a homosexual Jesus has been promoted by peripheral figures such as playwright Terrence McNally in his infamous 1998 play *Corpus Christi*, and Robert Williams, the late Episcopal priest ordained by Bishop John Shelby Spong. Jennings is the first to argue for Jesus’ participation in homo-erotic relationships from within the mainstream academy.

In order to make his case, Jennings turns especially to the Gospel of John and to its author, described as the disciple “whom Jesus loved.” Jennings turns this into an assertion of homosexual attachment and relationship. He works through various New Testament texts in order to find parallels, arguing that the youth in the garden [Mark 14:50-52] was a homosexual prostitute and that the Centurion’s servant healed by Jesus [Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10] was his homosexual lover. Jennings claims that this narrative “may be fairly read as Jesus’ acceptance of, and even collaboration in a pederastic relationship.”

Jesus, explains Jennings, was “fundamentally critical of marriage and family values.” This, he says, “may be heard as good news by those who are regularly denigrated because their very existence is regarded as a threat to “family values.” Furthermore: “A reconsideration of the Jesus tradition in this regard would also allow recognition of the importance of nontraditional families and the value, so often emphasized among gays and lesbians, of ‘families we choose’.” The church has misunderstood the Scripture, alleges Jennings, and has insisted on “compulsory heterosexuality.”

But Jennings is not even satisfied with this vocabulary. In an Orwellian twist, he suggests that the word “heterosexual” should be replaced with “cross-sex” to match “same-sex” for homosexuality. He promises that this will free our vocabulary from some of the “intellectual baggage” associated with the more commonly used terms.

In order to justify homosexual relationships, Jennings must also sever sex from procreation. As a matter of fact, Jennings accuses the church of linking sexuality and procreation in a way that distorts true humanity. “The realignment of sexuality and procreation together with the extreme suspicion that tradition has directed against the sexual sphere has produced the monstrosity that is traditional Christian sexual ethics.”

Clearly, Jennings’ obscene theory is the monstrosity. His book is not only an assault upon traditional Christian sexual ethics, but upon the person of Jesus Christ. His work is properly identified as heresy because it is explicit denial of the true humanity and true deity of Christ. Furthermore, it is an obscene and pornographic slander against the character, holiness, and sinlessness of the incarnate Son of God. In all its ugliness, it is a desperate ploy to undermine the Christian faith in order to support sexual practices and lifestyles condemned in the Scripture.

We should note that the publication in this book tells us as much about the world of liberal theological education as it does about Professor Jennings and his demented agenda. Chicago Theological Seminary is affiliated with the United Church of Christ, a denomination that grew out of American Congregationalism and has been on a steady march leftward

over the last half century or more.

The seminary's website identifies one of its core commitments in these words: "We are committed, while church and society are threatened by new forces of division under the banner of homophobia, to developing leadership for a more inclusive church and society." The United Church of Christ is so "inclusive" that one is hard pressed to imagine someone who would not be accepted for membership. As Mark Tooley of the Institute on Religion and Democracy comments: "The most liberal of America's mainline denominations, the UCC marries gays, or ordains witches, and prefers sit-ins (just name the cause) to evangelistic rallies. It's also been one of the fastest imploding churches, having lost about 40 percent of its members in 35 years." The denomination was the first to approve the ordination of sexually active homosexuals and allows churches to celebrate homosexual partnerships.

When it comes to Chicago Theological Seminary, nothing is out of bounds. In an article posted on the seminary's website, the institution explains that the publication of Professor Jennings book is entirely within his professorial rights. The seminary explains: "The pursuit of genuine scholarship and truly free inquiry is bound to raise issues that some would rather not examine. But the Congregationalist tradition in which this institution stands is one of freedom of conscience." Indeed, the conscience of these professors is free even from the Bible. "We unequivocally support academic freedom," the seminary claims—demonstrating their idolatry of the concept of academic freedom at the expense of theological orthodoxy.

Professor Jennings and his horribly offensive new book are prime exhibits of the anti-Christian ideologies accepted by the theological left and its fellow travelers. Determined to undermine Christianity at every turn, liberal theology is losing its mind.

