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Commentary — From the Margins

The Way We Live

In "The Way We Live" section of the October 28, 2004 edition of the *Detroit Free Press*, Susan Ager reports that her recent column, "A Saddened Mom's Letter to her Church" brought a long, thoughtful, but unsigned e-mail response from a Catholic priest. The column to which the priest replied was about the church endorsing Proposal 2, a state constitutional ban against gay marriage or civil union. The priest said that he struggled with the conflict between loyalty to his Archbishop and care for those same-sex couples "who are models of love, dedication and faithfulness" that are in his pews each Sunday. He went on to write, "The crisis of conscience is demoralizing and disturbing."

Meaning is assigned to words, a truism too often forgotten when phrases such as *models of love, dedication and faithfulness* are sincerely uttered by a secularly minded clergyman. The priest wrote that many of these same-sex couples have children—same-sex couples require the input of a third party of the opposite sex to have children. Where are the absent parents in these models of love, dedication and faithfulness?

In the middle of the 1st-Century, the fledgling Christian Church faced a crisis of conscience that was demoralizing and disturbing. The patriarch Abraham was then and remains the father of the faithful. The single great nation promised to Abraham consisted of all who are faithful to *YHWH*, his *Elohim*. This naming expression of deity is exclusionary, not inclusive. It excludes everyone who is not a circumcised Israelite. It excludes Greeks, Egyptians, Chaldeans and Chinese—unless members of these excluded ethnic peoples became proselytes through circumcision, baptism, and a gift to the temple. By covenant, uncircumcised peoples could have no relationship with *YHWH*, Israel's *Elohim*. And then, the promise was not to all of Abraham's descendants, but to Isaac, and to Jacob, their fathers' second born sons.

Jesus, an observant Jew, circumcised on the eighth day according to the traditions of Moses, was the model for how His disciples were to live. The everlasting covenant made with Abraham would have any uncircumcised male cut off from the holy nation of Israel. So those men from Judea who taught, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1), were on firm theological ground. For circumcision was the ratifying sign of the covenant through which Abraham received the Breath of God [*Pneuma 'Agion*] as the addition of the voiced radical /*ah*/ to his name reveals. Only, these men from Judea didn't understand what circumcision represented. They didn't know that the foreskin represented the natural skin covering of man, that its removal caused a man to spiritually appear naked before God just as the first Adam in Eden was physically naked, clothed only with his obedience to God. When that obedience ended, Adam saw himself as he was—and he made for himself an apron of fig leaves which left him still naked before God, who killed animals in Eden and made for Adam and his wife skin

clothing before driving them from Eden.

Paul and Barnabas hotly disputed what the men from Judea taught about the necessity of circumcision to be saved. At Calvary, Jesus of Nazareth became the garment that clothes all who have been born from above through receipt of the Holy Spirit. Christ Jesus had lived naked before His Elohim, and He as the *Logos* made flesh had needed no clothing other than His obedience to the law of God. Death is the earned wage for lawlessness, for sin. Because Jesus broke no law of God, death had no claim against His life. He had to be made sin through taking on the sins of all Israel as the reality of the Azazel or scapegoat before He could die as the paschal lamb for the household of God, a lamb appropriate to the size of the household. And the holy nation of Israel went from being the moon, the reflected glory of God, to being the woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12:1), clothed with the righteousness of the Son of Man.

In the creation account, on the 4th day, Elohim made two great lights, one for the day and one for the night—to separate the light from the darkness (Gen 1:16–18). Both lights rule over darkness. But the greater light is the source of the reflected light of the lesser sign that rules through the night, sometimes reflecting the fullness of the greater light, sometimes visibly absent [at the conjunction] from the night sky. This distinction between the sun and the moon symbolizes the distinction between the outwardly circumcised nation and the Church, cloaked for a season by the brightness of the sun. There have been, from Abraham since, righteous men and women in Israel, who, as Abraham did, kept God's law (Gen 26:5), which was neither far from them, nor too hard to keep (Deu 30:11). These men and women received circumcised hearts and minds (v. 6), a euphemistic expression for receiving the Breath of God after they turned to God and returned to obedience in a far land. By faith, these men and women who lived before the man Jesus of Nazareth was born of a woman "conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword...received back their dead by resurrection" (Heb 11:33–35). These men and women formed the symbolic woman that gave birth to the man-child who will rule all nations with a rod of iron (Rev 12:5); they preceded born-from-above disciples who, because of the better promises added to the second covenant, receive the Holy Spirit prior to obedience. These disciples of the glorified Jesus receive the Holy Spirit while they mentally live in foreign lands as children of disobedience (Eph 2:3). Spiritual birth is what causes these drawn (John 6:44, 65) and chosen (John 15:16) individuals to mentally leave the topography of their nativity and journey to Judea, where they will live as Jesus lived. His righteousness clothes them on their journey; His righteousness causes them to spiritually appear without spot or blemish. But they can remove His cloak of righteousness through physical circumcision before He removes this cloak through individual empowerment by the Holy Spirit which will liberate each disciple from the law of sin and death that still dwells in the members of the Body (Rom 7:25). When the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:26–30), the Body of Christ will be unclothed, except for its obedience to the law of God. The Body will then be as the circumcised nation has been since Abraham circumcised his household.

The Judeans that disputed with Paul and Barnabas were all teachers of the law; they

thought they understood circumcision. But they didn't understand that the act of circumcision effectively caused a newly-born disciple to put off the righteousness of Christ Jesus and cover himself with his own righteousness, with his own obedience to the laws of God when judgment was upon him. Circumcision inevitably condemned spiritual infants to the second death, thereby making the men from Judea spiritual murderers.

But the Body of Christ, now nearly two millennia old, is no longer a spiritual infant. It has, for these centuries, the record of the mid-1st Century Jerusalem Conference, which established a very low barre for Christian fellowship. New disciples were "to abstain from things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). Everything else that disciples needed to know could be learned from hearing Moses read every Sabbath in the synagogues (v. 21).

The entrance requirement for fellowship in the Body of Christ is abstention from sexual immorality...what constitutes sexual immorality? Does same-sex coupling constitute sexual immorality? In the world, same-sex coupling requires breaking fidelity in order to continue the species—and what the world does is really not the prerogative of the Church, for disciples are called out of the world. Disciples are to mentally leave the world, are to mentally relocate themselves to the hill country of Judea just as Abraham physically left the land of his nativity and journeyed to these same hills where he lived without a permanent abode, for the patriarch sought a city from above.

The priest who saw the same-sex couples as models of love no more understands love than the men of Judea with whom Paul and Barnabas disputed understood circumcision. The old creature called by God is to be crucified with Christ just as that circumcised nation which left Egyptian bondage died in the Wilderness of Sin, only to be replaced by its physically uncircumcised children. If this old creature were gay, then a gay man or woman has been nailed to the cross, a means of death that isn't instantaneous, but slowly kills through suffocation—through depriving the weakening body of its ability to breathe. The natural breath that the first Adam received from Elohim (Gen 2:7) must be lost so that the new creature, born-from-above through the Breath of God, will solely occupy the tabernacle that once belonged to this child of God's human parent. If the human parent corrupts the child, the child, too, will die; this child of God will lose its spiritual breath in the lake of fire. So these models of love are really no models at all for disciples.

In the past two millennia, the Body of Christ, under the cloak of His righteousness, hasn't grown robust and spiritually sound, but has become the flabby torso of a drunk, immoral and utterly lawless. Because His Body has been clothed in His righteousness, Christ has kept His Body spotless and without blemish while He awaited the arrival of the fullness of iniquity. When this fullness has been reached, the Son of Man will be revealed—this event will begin seven years of tribulation, the hard labor birth pains of the woman bringing many sons of God to glory. The Body only has to maintain itself blemish-free for seven years. But after seven months, it will sew for itself an apron of fig leaves, for it will take to itself the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It will rebel against God. It will not believe the two witnesses who testify that by faith the laws of God can be kept, that these laws are

neither far from the hearts and minds of disciples, nor too hard to keep. It will, instead, believe the ten witnesses that are the miry clay mixed with iron of the toes of Babylon.

When the Body of Christ is revealed, appearing thereby as naked as Adam was in Eden when his only clothing was his obedience to God, the greater Church will not require that disciples abstain from sexual immorality, and from what has been polluted by idols. Instead, this spiritually firstborn child of God will embrace models of love that are abhorrent to God, for its teachers refuse to break the legs of their own old creatures, crucified with Christ, but live on through taught lawlessness. These teachers will perform mighty works in Jesus' name, but He will deny knowing them in their judgment (Matt 7:21-23). The priest needs to realize that the gay person who was called by Christ has also been crucified with Christ. If Christ had not died on the cross, the priest would have no hope of salvation. Likewise, if his old creature doesn't die on the cross, he has no hope of salvation.

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