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Brentin Mock
Pittsburgh City Paper, Staff Writer

Hi Brentin,

Today I looked at your article "Ray of Hope: For Gay African Americans Faith Can Be a Struggle" which appeared on pp. 24-27 of Pittsburgh's *City Paper* (Apr. 19-Apr. 26, 2006, also featured on the cover; online version [here](#)). There are a number of good elements in the article, including the poignant focus on Raymond Smith and the fact that you did address, to some degree, different sides. I also appreciated that you quoted my distinction between race and sexual orientation and my general comment about the scriptural witness accurately. I enjoyed our talk over the phone. You seem like a nice guy. I think that your article could have been improved significantly at some points, with relatively few changes or without significant increase in length. Please hear me out.

A caveat: I understand that your article has to go through editors and it is possible that something that was originally in your article was taken out by someone other than you. I also don't attribute any bad intent on your part. For all I know you might even be opposed personally to providing cultural incentives for same-sex intercourse, even if that doesn't come across in the article.

1) It troubled me a bit that you gave a certain Deryck Tines, who is no biblical scholar and has written nothing on the subject that would be accepted in the academy of scholars, the opportunity to present a case against the applicability of the Leviticus and Sodom texts but no opportunity for me, who has published extensively on the subject, to explain why such arguments are misguided--and indeed arguments not even accepted by many scholars who support homosexual unions. The arguments against his conclusions are overwhelming but the reader would have not the slightest idea about this from your write-up, in which you give him the last word on the subject and me no word explaining why the texts in question remain relevant. It seems to me that, even in a sound-bite article of this sort, you could have made room for at least a 1-sentence statement from me, for each text, that would explain why Mr. Tines' reasoning about Scripture is flawed. (For the Sodom narrative and the Levitical prohibitions, you might start with my recent article, "Why the Disagreement over the Biblical Witness on Homosexual Practice?" at <http://www.westernsem.edu/wtseminary/assets/Gagnon2%20Aut05.pdf>, specifically pp. 46-54.)

If someone says, "I know Scripture is opposed to homosexual practice of any sort but I'm going to do it anyway," that's one thing. It's wrong but at least it's honest. For someone to

claim, however, that Scripture does not convey throughout its pages an other-sex or two-sex prerequisite for sexual unions is intellectually and morally dishonest. I understand that Mr. Tines, not you, is being quoted but the set-up of the article leaves readers the false impression that there is a credible, perhaps even superior, case for asserting that Scripture does not consistently and strongly oppose homosexual unions.

2) I did not cite just the Sodom and Levitical texts to you but many other texts; indeed far more significant was my discussion of Jesus and Paul. You took nothing from my remarks about Paul (Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9 are, after all, the key texts, in addition to Mark 10 and Genesis 1:27; 2:24). The part of my remarks about Jesus that you took (the "deny yourself" text) speaks to the issue of homosexual practice but is not the part where Jesus clearly indicates the necessity of two-sex unions for the 'twoness' or monogamy principle.

3) You said that I contend that homosexual persons "must deny their sexuality." That is not quite accurate, though I can understand how you may have misunderstood. Persons who experience homoerotic desires, like persons experiencing any impulses (sexual or otherwise) that run contrary to the will of God, must not live out of such impulses; or, whenever they are carried out, to confess one's sins to God and renew one's commitment to live for Christ rather than for oneself. One's "sexuality" is more than the constellation of sexual urges at any given segment in a person's life. It involves other elements of embodied existence ordained by God, like the fact that men and women are each other's sexual counterparts (not two men or two women). In the deepest sense, someone who does not live out of homosexual impulses does not deny his or her true sexuality but actually lives in accordance with it.

To give examples that we would all agree on, persons who refrain from carrying out intense and innate sexual desires to have intercourse with more than one person concurrently, with close blood relations, or with children do not "deny their sexuality" in the deepest sense, do they? They deny certain sexual urges but their sexuality consists of more than just these urges.

4) This above point leads me to my next observation. Your paper highlighted the following quote from Mr. Tines: "Sexual desires don't come from some *body* else. They come from God" (emphasis on "body"). Given the fact that there are so many kinds of bodily sexual urges that are obviously immoral (I mention three above and it's not hard to imagine others, to say nothing of thousands of non-sexual desires), how is it possible to argue that every innate sexual desire "comes from God"? The fact that many (indeed, most) don't, renders the conclusion absurd, doesn't it?

5) Although you quote well my observation about the differences between race and sexual orientation, it is placed in a context that looks pejorative. After quoting me, you say: "Conservatives have seized on logic like this" and then refer to political initiatives. What does "logic like this" mean? And why refer at all to "conservatives"? You go on to quote Donald Hammonds who urges the African-African community to accept "people who are different from themselves." Rather than referring to this as "the kind of logic

used by liberals,” you say approvingly: “Some are trying already” to do just that, i.e., accept people who are different from themselves. “Standing in stark opposition to the positions espoused by Long and Gagnon is minister Deryck Tines. . . .” There is no subsequent reflection on the fact that the issue here is not about “accepting people different from ourselves” but about whether we should accept all consensual behaviors arising from deeply engrained impulses.

6) Finally, although I talked to you about what true love is in connection with this issue, none of that was presented in your references to me. True love, as Jesus and the apostles taught us, means upholding God’s ethical demands while reaching out in love to the biggest violators of that demand. Most parents at some point will hear their children say in response to some directive that they don’t like, “You don’t love me.” The argument that love necessitates acceptance of homosexual unions has a similar ring to it. It is possible, of course, to advocate obedience in an unloving and ungracious fashion. But it is absolutely impossible to love someone truly by enabling someone to persist in a form of behavior that, if unrepented of, could put someone at risk of not inheriting eternal life. The context for the command, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18b), makes this point: You shall not hate, take revenge, or hold a grudge against your neighbor. But if your neighbor does wrong, you shall reprove your neighbor, lest you incur guilt for failing to warn them (Lev 19:17-18a). Jesus alluded to this context when he stated: If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents forgive him—even if, Jesus adds, he sins seven times a day (Luke 17:3-4).

I thank you for reading this. And I challenge you, gently: If you are interested in finding out what Scripture (including Jesus) says about this issue, and not merely in using Scripture to serve particular ends (I’m not insinuating that you want to do the latter), read some of the material that I (and others) have written on the subject. You could start with my recent response to a book favoring "gay marriage" by Myers and Scanzoni. Just go to my website at www.robgnon.net and click the most recent article (top right) and check out the arguments.

Sincerely,

Rob

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