Written by **Selwyn Duke** on October 26, 2010

Blaming Religion for Homosexual Suicide

Can a waning phenomenon have a waxing effect? If a survey conducted on the relationship between religious messages and homosexual suicide is to be believed, the answer is yes. The survey, conducted jointly by the Public Religion Research Institute and the Religion News Service, found, writes Kirsten Moulton in The Salt Lake Tribune, "Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that messages from U.S. religious pulpits are connected to the rising rates of suicide among gay youths…."

This conclusion isn't surprising, given how propaganda reigns today, but it makes no sense. After all, how can an increasing rate of homosexual suicide be caused by a message that is decreasing in frequency? The fact is that if this suicide rate was lower many years ago, it was so during a time when homosexuality was in the closet and stigmas against it were the default. Today, in contrast, "coming out" is lauded, we have open homosexuals in public office and sympathetically portrayed homosexual characters in film and on TV, and books such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* are childhood fare. As for churches, I can't say I've heard many fire-and-brimstone denunciations of any sin — let alone homosexual behavior — from pulpits of late. So what are the messages to which the survey respondents refer? Are they perhaps indicting the clergy for *not*warning their flocks of the perils of indulging certain inclinations? (I can have my fantasies, can't I?)

Obviously, the thesis here doesn't hold water. And one possibility is that the rate of homosexual suicide hasn't really increased, only the awareness of it. After all, given the reluctance to emerge from the closet in years past, if distress over homosexual feelings had driven someone to take his life, how likely is it that anyone would have known the reason? Another possible explanation is that the rate has increased, but it has nothing to do with religious messages.

But yet another possibility is that, like Naomi Wolf's tall tale about how 150,000 women a year die from

anorexia, the claim of an increase in homosexual suicide is an outright fabrication. After all, if you want to attract attention to a cause — and effect change —it helps to peddle a phony statistic and say that (gasp!) the sky will fall unless we "take drastic action right now!"

And the change social engineers seek is, first and foremost, one in attitude: The removal of all stigmas against homosexuality. Here is a case in point, from Moulton's piece:

> The executive director of Faith in America, a nonprofit group founded in 2005 to combat negative religious messages about homosexuality, pointed to the poll as progress for his cause.
>
> "There is a growing awareness and understanding," observed Brent Childers to Religion News Service, "about the harm that is caused when society places a religious or moral stamp of disapproval on the lives of gay and lesbian individuals, especially youths."

I wonder, what would Childers do to those who place this stamp of disapproval on homosexuality? Would he place a stamp of disapproval on them?

The truth is that everyone disapproves and stamps. To paraphrase a point I read long ago, stigmas are corollaries of values (which may or may not be positive). If you're going to value certain qualities — such as honesty, perseverance, normal sexuality or tolerance for an abnormal variety — it follows that their opposites will be devalued. Thus, since society will always uphold some set of values, it will always have stigmas.

Likewise, there is no such thing as people who don't support stigmas; the only difference among them is what stigmas they would support. For instance, politically correct folks rail against the stigmatization of homosexuality, yet their very own political correctness involves stigmas targeting those who violate its code of behavior (you can ask Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder, scientist James Watson, John Rocker, or Juan Williams about their effectiveness). And while any stigmatized person could experience psychological distress, does anyone imply that political correctness should be scrapped for this reason alone? When conservative students are treated as second class in schools today (as 11-year-old Sam Besserman attested to here), does anyone worry that such scorn and ostracism may drive them to suicide? Do the media place the onus on academia (and on themselves) for peddling anti-conservative messages? And is it implied that these stigmas should be eliminated *on the basis that stigmas are bad in principle*?

It isn't — nor should it be. Stigmas are absolutely necessary in principle; you might say that stigmas are the criminal-justice arm of a social code. As for the particular, they are no more or less valid than that to which they correlate, and this is why society must uphold not merely values, but virtues. Then there is the last thing: to encourage the embrace of virtue. And this is done, partially, through the stigmatization of vice.

And this isn't something to be taken lightly. For if you choose to stigmatize the wrong things, people may commit suicide. If you choose to stigmatize the right things, people may commit suicide. It is only when you make the wrong choice, however, that your nation commits suicide.

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