

Theism, Tradition and Culture Versus Science, Fairness and Rationality

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Tradition becomes our security, and when the mind is secure it is in decay - Jiddu Krishnamurti

People that read my online column on a regular basis know that I sometimes demonstrate how tradition and culture often provide barriers to genuine human progress. A case in point is a DVD I recently viewed. In “Homosexuality: Loving in all the Wrong Places” (2008) by Afrocentric Pastor Ray Hagins, the minister draws upon theism, African traditions and culture to condemn homosexuality.

Drawing upon Ancient Egyptian teachings, Hagins tells his audience that God created male and female. Moreover, he insists that God made positive and negative magnetic forces, to support his argument that opposites attract and that homosexuality is contrary to nature (as well as un-African). He reads a statement from the so-called Negative Confessions condemning “unnatural” sexual relations.

Hagins, Chief Elder and Spiritual Leader of the Afrikan (sic) Village and Cultural Center, insists that we are provided with a blank slate and that we choose how to express our sexuality culturally. He contends that high levels of estrogen in male fetuses and high levels of testosterone in female fetuses play no real determination in sexual identity or orientation. He says that chemical imbalances have nothing to do with sexual orientation and he contends - probably correctly - that there is no *conclusive* scientific evidence that genes or hormones largely determine one’s sexual orientation. (However, he seems willfully ignorant of the fact that there is still *strong* scientific evidence that genes and hormones determine sexual orientation.)

The minister insists that true hermaphrodites do not exist. He contends that what are believed to be hermaphrodites are simply females with enlarged clitorises. However, he is woefully misinformed, and merely repeats a mistake that dogmatic Afrocentrists often make.

In reality, researchers have made mistakes. Hagins is probably thinking about the famous case of the wild spotted hyena, in which researchers found an enlarged clitoris in a female and believed her to be a hermaphrodite. However, hermaphrodites do exist.

Hermaphrodites have been found among fish, slugs, snails, earth worms, humans and other species. They have even been found in the plant kingdom among garden plants. Among human beings, the preferred term is “intersex,” because it is more accurate and less likely to stigmatize.

During his presentation, in the name of African tradition, Hagins defended polygyny, or the practice of having two or more wives at a time. During the Q&A session, one young woman merely questioned whether the minister was saying that men should have the right to fool around with many women. Hagins admonished the woman and said that people hear what they want to hear, and not what was actually said. He reiterated that he was talking about polygyny, in which men marry the women and raise their children, not promiscuity.

Ironically, this is Hagins' problem. He hears what he wants to hear in science. When he feels that he can use science to defend his Afrocentric worldview, he will do so in a heartbeat. However, when good science does not support the conclusions he is seeking, he will kick it to the curb or distort its findings to suit his purposes.

Throughout Africa rabid religious nuts are trying to pass or enforce laws that make homosexuality punishable by death. Yet the first laws against homosexuality in Africa were put into effect by European colonialists. Not surprisingly, White evangelical Christians from the U.S. are leading the way to pass laws that would put homosexuals to death in Uganda, Nigeria and other African nations. Sadly, though predictably, Afrocentrists opposing such laws are nowhere to be found. Ironically, as many African LGBT activists and their Western supporters point out, homosexuality has not been brought to Africa by White Westerners. On the contrary, White Westerners have transported *homophobia* to the Mother Land.

According to Hagins, agape to White Christians does not mean the greatest love of all, the love of God, as it does to Blacks. Rather, it means what it meant to the Greeks: the sexual love of men for boys. In actuality, it means altruistic love. Indeed, it was the main idea that moved Martin Luther King to continue embracing Christianity when he was going through a serious crisis of faith.

Hagins must be oblivious to the fact that homosexual behavior has been documented in hundreds of animal species, including insects. This is just one more fact for Hagiins to casually dismiss simply because it does not support his claim that homosexuality is unnatural. However, Hagins is in good company in this regard.

Some years ago there was an animal documentary on television in Norway in which homosexual behavior among whales was filmed. Religious conservatives in the nation went nuts and demanded that the documentary be censored.

To hear Hagins talk, one would think that homophobia in the West never existed, or is a relic from the past. However, nothing could be more wrong. Until the Stonewall riots that started in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969 in Greenwich Village, New York City, the vast majority of LGBT people were in the closet, living lives wracked with fear and shame - just as religious conservatives wanted. Today there are still millions of LGBT people in the closet in the West, and homophobic harassment and violence against them is still widespread, especially among teens. Teenage suicide among LGBT people is still widespread.

It should seem obvious to anyone with just a modicum of common sense that we have come a long way since the days of Ancient Egypt. An obsession with tradition and/or the supposed importance of culture seems to inevitably lead to hopelessly reactionary and authoritarian individuals, ideas, organizations, institutions and governments. It makes people stubborn, cruel and unsympathetic to the plight of historically oppressed groups.

Good and courageous people must stand up to the reactionary voices and forces of intolerance, often rooted in culture, tradition and theism. We must use history as a tool to build, not a weapon to destroy. We must wisely use history as a guide post, and not a hitching post. It must become the best friend of humanity and not the enemy of those that simply want to live their lives as they see fit.

