



Virtuous? Woman

A critique of two articles from the campus publication Virtuous Woman

By Nicholas Shepard

Occasionally, LAMBDA chooses to respond to homophobic attacks from other campus publications. Virtuous Woman, a UNC Christian women's magazine "initiated by a Godly vision, created through a Christ-like love," printed an article titled "Election of Openly Gay Bishop Strikes Controversy" by Laurie Beck in fall 2003. Being a fairly balanced piece on the ordination of the Rev. V. Eugene Robinson in the Episcopalian Church, an Editor's Note was needed to ensure that any of Virtuous Woman's readers in danger of thinking for her or himself thought twice: "No matter what man may think or believe, God clearly says that homosexuality is a sin." This embarrassingly obvious sexist language in a "women's" publication served simply to shut down any dialogue on the subject. Citing the old favorite, "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the note rehashes familiar, thinly-masked messages of hate, propped up by out-of-context Bible verses and "common sense" homophobic rubbish. In response to the unvirtuous who might claim "you can't help what you feel," the Virtuous editor reminds us, "God says that there is nothing -- no feeling -- that cannot be overcome through Jesus." Ever heard of the notoriously ineffective "ex-gay" ministries, which attempt to recruit gay and lesbian Christians back into the heterosexual flock?

Two UNC Christians quoted in the article would not necessarily oppose the ordination of a gay man who was "working around" same-sex desire, but he must not be "practicing," "living with a gay" and "living a life of sin." So Rev. Robinson's problem is not his deep-seated internal desire to love and live with another man but his affirmation of that desire. In other words, so long as we acknowledge our same-gender attractions as afflictions to cure, there's no problem -- self-hatred, repression and denial of our deepest feelings is the most Christian course of action. However, if we refuse to live a lie that eats away at our souls and requires a fundamental (and un-Christian?) dishonesty, we are rejected as perverse sinners. If Virtuous Woman is, as it claims, "created through a Christ-like love," I would urge the "godly" publication to follow Jesus' example and say exactly what He said about homosexuality: nothing.

Another article by Rachel Johnson titled "Fear-

lessly Feminine: Feminism According to God's Standards" discusses a book called "Fearlessly Feminine" by Jani Ortlund. Despite Johnson's useful critique of a femininity based on materialism and superficial beauty standards, the alternative "virtuous Christian" model of femininity she proposes is as anti-feminist as anything Virtuous Woman proposes. Johnson notes, citing Ortlund: "God calls us to be servants and to be a servant is a scary thing." Johnson assures us that servitude doesn't mean "fill[ing] the June Cleaver role of the ever-dutiful homemaker" but to "serve God in every way possible in whatever [women] do." One "feminist" cited, Amy Carmichael, is praised for having "made her life a statement of affirmation -- affirmation that God is in control, and that she puts her life in His hands." According to Johnson, this is "the foundation of femininity."

Call me radical, but as I understand it feminism is a struggle for equality between men and women where neither women nor men are forced into a specific role based solely upon their sex. If women must be "servants" and "affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men," I don't see much room for equality. The idea that a maturely feminine woman must "put her [lowercase] life in His [uppercase] hands" indicates the fundamentally patriarchal, anti-feminist nature of this femininity. If a woman's lack of control -- submission -- is, as Johnson explicitly states, the very "foundation of femininity," then I'd argue that an authentic feminism should argue for the *abolition of femininity*. Equality between people, male or female, should be based on a fundamental respect for human dignity rather than constricting gender roles based around female submission.

Purporting to focus "on inspiring and encouraging women of faith to grow, and become all that God has called them to be," Virtuous Woman actually does little to inspire genuine growth or acceptance of the full range of human sexuality. If Virtuous Woman truly intends "not to condemn," then they certainly have not yet fully embraced what *they* are called to be. λ

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