

Why God is Up:

And why some Mennonites are moving toward Queer inclusion

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Ethicists have known for centuries human beings have radically different views of morality. The general discussion has been over which is the “one-true” morality and which are the “false” moralities, and then how to rationally use the one “true” morality to solve all ethical conundrums. For the last few decades, based heavily on the findings of social psychology and more recently of neuro-psychology, a number of scholars have been explaining the variety of moralities on the basis of the intrinsic workings of the human brain. According to these scholars the reason humans have multiple moralities is because the human brain is wired for multiple moralities and human beings apply these moralities in different ways under different social conditions.

Over the last few decades scholars have proposed that there are four (Fiske), five (Bolender), or even six (Haidt) fundamental moralities built into human existence. Each morality is expressed in profoundly different ways. In any specific case, human beings appear to zoom between moralities, spinning out complex combinations, in order to resolve specific moral problems. Of course cultural conditions are immensely contributive to the way any specific individual or group uses these fundamental moralities. The final moral content is always cultural.

No one is certain how these moralities function, whether they are completely neural in origin (intrinsic brain patterns), or how they might most effectively be used to understand moral behaviour. What is certain is human beings do use different moralities and when using them tend to see any other morality as immoral in relation to the issue at hand. These moral perceptions are also primarily emotional—satisfaction or disgust—with a range of intensities. This raises the question of the role of reason and consciousness in moral decision making. The conclusion of many studies is that human beings are not morally persuaded by reason but by the resolution of personal emotional responses to action alternatives. The role of reason is first to justify pre-existing emotional responses, and secondarily to dig individuals out of serious problems once they fail to justify their emotional responses (Kahneman, Gigerenzer, Haidt).

From this perspective of pre-wired moral-emotional response, the theoretical conclusion is that while morality is intuited as a conflict between right and wrong, this intuition is merely a reinterpretation of what is going on in the brain in order to assist its experiencers to justify their own feelings and subsequent behaviour. The brain feels satisfaction or disgust and asks consciousness to explain them through abstract rational and relational categories. The underlying experience leading to moral judgment is thus

not rational conclusions about the moral validity of behaviours but intuitive and highly emotional responses to the behaviours of others.

A further consideration is the role of geometry and spatial relations in the way human beings orient their moral intuitions and conceptualizations. Quadflieg et al. (2011) build on a series of studies linking conceptual thought to spatial relations to determine brain dynamics related to the placement of concepts in spatial terms. They conclude the human brain uses "metaphorical mapping"(2646) to manage thinking, with verticality a key aspect of how the brain orients the meaning of concepts. So "up" connects to concepts of both goodness and power. They suspect this outcome is the result of an evolutionary process where the human mind has taken over "older structures of the brain for new uses so that sensory and motor representations from physical interactions with the world may be adopted to support abstract thought"(2646).

Similarly, Tversky (2011) finds that there appears to be an inherent spatial geometry within the human brain that guides how human beings metaphorically and conceptually organize their worlds, and it is not merely that human beings use these shapes to guide thinking. The shapes themselves appear to be built into the brain and have an innate conceptual framework. Relative location is important and vertical arrays are inherently evaluative and indicate importance, with important objects perceived as higher than less important objects. Tversky speculates this is due to the power of gravity in organismic experience. "It takes power, strength, health, and energy to go upwards," (513) and thus more of vertical is good and less of it is bad. She indicates this relationship is so powerful "the visual trumps the conceptual and [sometimes] misleads" (520).

What is clear from the literature is that morality exists in physically embodied relationships interpreted metaphorically, and in discreet and competing forms of neural-moral functioning interpreted culturally. To understand any moral response one must first explore how it is emerging from brain wiring and intrinsic relational processing, and then how it is being interpreted through cultural precepts, traditions, and patterns. Together one can begin to understand how people, as individuals and groups, make moral sense of the world around them and construct ethical responses. What remains is first to create a useable framework for collectively managing these responses, and then an attempt to apply them, in this case to recent Mennonite struggles around the issue of Queer inclusion.

Seven moral structures

While the research support for qualitatively distinct moralities is certain, the best arrangement that integrates the most current research has not been articulated. On that basis I propose a seven structured approach using embodied relational geometries. This is a new perspective not yet found in the related literature, but integrating multiple strands of theory and research. According to this perspective human beings are located in three-dimensional space and use their abilities and experiences in 3D space to define their existence and as metaphoric structures for abstract reasoning (Quadflieg et.al.,

Tversky). There are, I argue, at least seven such relational geometries each leading to a specific pattern of concrete and abstract moral reasoning and imagination. These seven are the transcendent, the familial, the hierarchical, the equitable, the tactical, the strategic, and the aesthetic. Those familiar with the work of Fiske will see that four of these are based upon his research (though not fully identical), while the others are my own integration of the evidence.

1. Transcendent

The moral structure of transcendence is the geometry of oneness with existence sensed as the loss of self in the context of the cosmos. This is sometimes identified as a mystical experience, but is more common than pure mysticism and may occur as a brief transient state in many circumstances including worship or prayer, or even rhythmic movement (Haidt) or sexual encounter (Greeley). It is also known to take place in nature (Bolender). The transcendent moral framework is centered in the unitive nature of all creatures with(in) the creator. However, this transcendence can take a number of forms, including the encounter with vast cosmic evil as well as good, for judgment as well as love (Otto). Positive or negative, this is a relatively rare experience for most folk since the brain activity involved requires careful training, strong natural proclivity, or specific unusual experiences.

2. Familial

The familial moral structure is that of the strongly bounded small group. While not exclusively that of the family, the family is the most common experience and normal defining point of this moral experience. Within the family the moral content revolves around altruism, mutual generosity, and functional equivalency. Self-sacrifice at all levels (moral, psychological, material) is normative. Boundary conditions are critical, with a very strong sense of personal identity tied to being within the group. External others are not relevant to this moral world. However, there may be a weak sense of moral relation to the transcendent, typically focused on whether the "family" is morally "rising" or "falling" against the cosmos itself. Following some aspects of Haidt's work, the boundary condition is likely to be expressed in two terms, sanctity and loyalty.

3. Hierarchical

The hierarchical moral structure forms as human beings begin to explore the relationship between moral units such as families. The brain has an inherent need to organize objects in vertical arrays, attributing power and goodness to those objects that rank higher, and ranking higher those concepts that suggest power and goodness. In the hierarchical moral structure two characteristics are relevant, the location in the hierarchy and adherence to the hierarchy itself. Obedience is the most important virtue, but integrity follows as a close corollary since a unity between person and role is an expected characteristic belonging to all social hierarchies.

4. Equitable

Equitable moral structures are about the radial distribution of individuals in relation to sources of social goods such as justice, health-care, or power. It may also apply to other social goods such as economic or educational access, sources of sustenance, and

ecological resources. Liberal democracy and democratic institutions very much reflect this moral structure where every individual has exactly the same moral weight in relation to any social distribution. It can be imagined as a circle where everyone stands at the edge of the circle, exactly the same distance from the centre of distribution. Correct moral relations exist when each individual stands exactly (or abstractly similarly) in relation to the distributed good.

5. Tactical

The tactical moral structure is built around the goodness of expansion, of getting bigger, better, and stronger. It reflects the ability to make trade-offs and adjust characteristics in order to achieve more of a specific good. It is traditionally represented by Utilitarian ethical systems that emphasize the greatest good for the greatest number.

6. Strategic

Strategic moral structures are onto-theological (theologies of being) and strongly oriented to aptness of fit and to relational consistency or coherence. Put square pegs in square holes, might be its motto. This moral structure is typically highly abstract, based in logic, and developed out of complex perspectives and formulaic gathering of evidence.

7. Aesthetic

The aesthetic moral structure is built around large scale symmetry and symmetry breaking. It is a traditional system of moral engagement that reflects the arts and culture, but can be used metaphorically in terms of truth itself as beauty. Moral existence is found in the goodness of rhythm and pattern, of complex interactions of harmony and creative interaction. The strength of the aesthetic is its flexibility, its connection to taste, and its call for long and disciplined hard-work by its advocates.

These seven exist as a linear array of choices and human beings move between them sequentially, with the normal rest state typically being either the familial or the hierarchical. Movement between the seven is accomplished by a shift of "moral focus" and each mode identifies different aspects of the issue as significant even as it provides qualitatively different ways of solving the moral problem. Human beings also shift between points of moral focus in milliseconds, often not stopping long enough to create a thought that lasts in memory. The process of shifting perspectives is almost always unconscious.

The result is that people can think about an issue in hierarchical terms, locate it within a strategic response, and finally conclude with an aesthetic moral evaluation while in the process failing to distinguish between the incompatibilities or limitations of the various perspectives, but feeling certain they have identified a correct moral response to the situation because the result feels good. It is only when others fail to accept this response that it becomes subject to careful analysis. But with care and attention, the full dynamic can be unpacked and more reasoned and consistent responses constructed.

Seven Mennonite Moral Responses to Queer Inclusion

One of the most hotly contested issues in Christianity today is that of Queer inclusion. The type of participation and/or moral legitimacy of Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, or Intersex persons (GLBTI) within various Christian groups is one that leads to very divergent moral perspectives. I group all these sexual and gender enactments together as a unitary part of the struggle for Queer inclusion. In doing so I use the word Queer to mean not a specific approach to human sexuality (though some use it as that) but a general perspective on human existence as constructed over-against social conventions of gender and sexuality.

Viewed from the seven moral perspectives, the moral conflict is not surprising. For all seven forms of moral intuition Queer existence poses a challenge. Alternate or constructed sexualities and gender displays are always “over-against” normative (or hegemonic) moral approaches to sexuality and as a result most of the seven moral structures have a traditional content that exclude Queers. The normal human reaction to any difference is discomfort, even if one feels rational alignment with the difference. That is, anything “over-against” creates significant anxiety for all involved.

This negative moral intuition is intensified in the Mennonite world by its still strong ties to the agricultural world and subsequent metaphoric hetero-normativity of land and animal fertility for perceiving existence itself. What one grows up with becomes the metaphoric basis for abstract reasoning later in life. Urban and industrial existence does not rely on hetero-normative economic structures for its existence, and thus people with long urban traditions are more likely to embrace sexual and gender difference. However, the fundamental metaphors and brain structures of most Mennonites are blocked to Queer life and thus moral change in this area requires intense social confrontation and restructuring at the level of neurons and deeply embedded pathways of moral imagination.

If, as I believe, there are seven moralities built into the Mennonite brain and expressed through the traditions of Mennonite life and Anabaptist theology, then by mapping the seven and their possibilities it should be possible to clearly demarcate the many current positions, identify why the conflict is so intense. But it should also suggest ways for moving forward. Ideally the way forward will make sense in terms of those who work from the seven structures such that they can find grounds for cooperation or compromise.

The section that follows explores these seven moral structures by examining them briefly, looking at them in Mennonite history and tradition, and then applying them to both the possibilities of Queer exclusion as well as Queer inclusion. This radically oversimplifies the use of these structures since in actual engagements human beings

typically combine two, three, or even four structures in a nested way in order to develop their personal positions. However, it does permit a certain type of clarity around the way the individual structures work. Critical analysis always involves simplification of issues and responses, but ideally it produces important insights leading to improved actions.

Finally, the application is to the two North American Mennonite strains known variously as General Conference Mennonites and Old Mennonites. Awkwardly united in the Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, these two have been openly caught in this difficult transition with strong voices against and for Queer inclusion. While other Mennonite groups feel this struggle, the voices for Queer inclusion have been relatively quiet to this point.

1. Transcendent

Mennonite identity and theology has often been identified in the context of medieval mystical thought as typified by Thomas á Kempis and the Brethren of the Common Life in the Dutch Lowlands or the Cloud of Unknowing and Meister Eckhart in the upper Rhine region of "Swiss" Mennonite origins. Menno Simons' work was deeply influenced by mystical patterns of moral expression, even if not directly mystical itself. Thus one would expect transcendent moral intuitions to be a common part of Mennonite ethics. This turns out not to be the case, but it still has some relevance to the issue of Queer inclusion.

Applied against inclusion

The mystical unity of all in Christ that underlies a significant strand of Mennonite and Anabaptist life and thought does not easily work against inclusion of Queer folk. However, its expression is typically in the context of a hetero-normative community thus giving it an implicit hetero-normative cast because all actual experiences of transcendence will be against a hetero-normative backdrop. For those few for whom the experience of transcendence is a highly negative experience (transcendent evil), the fear of personal absorption into evil might well lead to a sense of deep avoidance of the different or strange.

Applied for inclusion

As a general framework for human life, mystical unity profoundly works in favour of the inclusion of all, no matter how different or counter-normative they may be. Instead it proclaims the worthiness of all as loved by God. As a Christian expression it is likely to lead to the loving embrace of difference, especially in the context of transcendent love expressed through an identification with the inclusive ministry of Jesus Christ.

Likely outcome for Mennonites

Contemporary Mennonites have typically forgotten or ignored their mystical origins, or express their mysticism within worship (hymn singing), thus leading them to miss the generally inclusive sense this moral structure encourages. The one possible exception to this may be Mennonites who participate in community choirs where Queer folk also

participate. The transcendent experience of music making together is likely to bleed over to a strong sense of moral inclusion.

2. The Familial

For Mennonites the familial is a very powerful and traditional source of moral identity, with the immediate name family and the religious family serving as powerful moral anchors for personal identity and action. Mennonites often identify themselves as a religious family and the concept of the pure (mystical) family is a deeply entrenched framework of collective moral analysis. Traditionally this has been expressed in strong family based communities, supported by family based economic structures where families working together produce not only survival but great wealth in relation to surrounding non-Mennonite communities.

Applied against inclusion

The agrarian Mennonite family is strongly hetero-normative in experience and practice and thus the inclusion of Queer folk is a violation of the sanctity of the family. Queers in essence violate the purity of the family, call into question core norms, and lead to a sense of deep personal/identity discomfort. This discomfort is likely to be magnified by those experiencing personal gender confusion or clashing cultures as can happen in the move from rural to urban settings something many Mennonites continue to experience.

Applied for inclusion

While hetero-normative, the experience of many Mennonite families is of the presence of Queer family members. Family members may demonstrate Queer characteristics or be actively Gay, Lesbian, or Bi-sexual. The same strong normative commitment to family within the Mennonite world would lead Mennonites with such social experiences to find inclusion a vital part of moral inclusion. From this point of view the possibility of exclusion is a betrayal of the family itself. Instead inclusion will be a core value of religious experience, in as much as the family is the centre of faith.

Likely outcome for Mennonites

Familial ethical structures lead to a deeply divided Mennonite community based around personal experience of Queer folk. The alternate violations of sanctity (by inclusion) or loyalty (through exclusion) lead to clashes that are hard to reconcile. In as much as the cultural experience of North American Mennonites is of a civil-rights culture where Queer expression is not only common but legally protected, and thus more likely to find expression within Mennonite family life, the shift is probably going to be toward increasing levels of inclusion. However, for those Mennonites in isolated locations, where hetero-normative dynamics are strongly enforced and broader social forces more distant, this will be a slower process.

In many respects, this is probably the moral structure that will define the final shift within Mennonite moral and religious thought and result in full inclusion. The familial is central to personal identity and the presence of Queer family members, even if a step removed, will transform the identity of all those who are in contact with them. The only possibility of maintaining a firm exclusive boundary is to define Queer family members

as somehow intrinsically evil (foundationally and inextricably impure) and requiring immediate exclusion, probably with the expulsion of the rest of their family since they have been contaminated by that evil. In the face of genuine familial love and a protective social context this is unlikely to be the long-term outcome. Exclusion also violates a conservative Christian family moral norm of the family as a primary source of divine grace (sacrament).

3. Hierarchical

For Mennonites moral hierarchies have been extremely important, though taking significantly different forms in different Mennonite communities. The variation is essentially between using social hierarchies as the dominant component of the hierarchy or using framing concepts as the dominant component of the hierarchy. From Menno Simons through Jacob Amman and on to the bishops of contemporary American Mennonite life, the social hierarchy has been an important way to structure Mennonite moral existence, especially in terms of role obedience. The “Swiss” tradition in particular has stressed conformity at all levels (role obedience) as a key part of one’s moral legitimacy. On the other hand, from the Waterlanders through the isolated Swiss Mennonite congregations, a much more egalitarian form of moral life has been practiced, where the Bible has formed a normative structure and where personal integrity has been expressed in commitment to biblical living rather than a specific personal hierarchy or set of role strictures.

Applied against inclusion

Almost all the aspects of strong intuitive hierarchical structures work against inclusion. Within the Mennonite world the three core hierarchical frameworks, rural social life, church, and Bible are hetero-normative. While any of the three can be interpreted in Queer inclusive ways, the three as they exist now draw upon centuries of hetero-normative thought. This thought has been intensified among Mennonites by drawing upon “Evangelical-Christian” North American cultural conservative value systems to strengthen the traditional hetero norms.

Applied for inclusion

It is difficult to apply hierarchical moral structures for inclusion. While it is possible to argue that any one of the three Mennonite hierarchical sources of identity is not a legitimate source of Mennonite moral thinking, the three together form a powerfully intuitive moral framework. Inclusion on these grounds is likely to fail. However, the strong social hierarchies dominated by bishops have the most potential flexibility since individual bishops, particularly those affected by familial dynamics, may choose to enforce a new hierarchy of Queer inclusion.

Likely outcome for Mennonites

Mennonites are deeply divided on the role of hierarchies in moral engagement. The Old Mennonite tradition has typically found hierarchies to be an important part of defining Christian moral existence. However, the General Conference tradition has been explicitly anti-hierarchical in its structure. More importantly, recent shifts in Mennonite theology due to the impact of the Neo-Anabaptism of John Howard Yoder and others

has supported an anti-hierarchical perspective. Within the culture of North American egalitarianism this anti-hierarchical perspective gains additional support. In all likelihood, Mennonites will divide in the short term around the traditions of strong hierarchical religious structure and anti-hierarchical faithfulness. In the long-term, anti-hierarchical thinking in the culture and the economic life of its adherents will probably lead to the diminishment of the moral weight of this type of thinking.

4. Equitable

Mennonites have had a strong tradition of economic equitability. This is found in bilateral partible inheritance (all children inherit equally), credit unions, traditions of land distribution, and other cooperative church-based economic structures. Male democracy with regard to church leadership has a strong history, one that picked up moral weight in the context of North American understandings of liberal democracy. Neo-Anabaptism in particular embraces this political ethic as a theological truth.

Applied against inclusion

The only social good which might be upset by inclusion of Queer folk is the right to personal self-determination in terms of right of association. If Queer folk have equal access to church life then it interferes with the right, shared with all others, to determine with whom an individual associates. Logically this position is not strong, but it does have an emotional appeal.

Applied for inclusion

This moral structure is a very powerful source of inclusion for Queer folk. In identifying Queer folk as "folk" they are automatically identified as people who belong to the circle of distribution. In as much as such folk carry other key indicators (baptism, adherence to theology, participation in the traditions, etc.) they are automatically identified as having the same rights of access to the distributed sources of church life, including voting, speaking, worship leadership, rites such as marriage, or church ministry.

Likely outcome for Mennonites

Given the strongly democratic structure of much of the Mennonite tradition, plus the participatory-democratic essence of Neo-Anabaptism, this structure will be a point of strong support for Queer inclusion. Given the participatory democratic nature of the surrounding culture, leading as it does to the granting of human rights to Queer folk, the social impetus for this view will grow. Those Mennonites who are strongly associated with public education, social agencies or Mennonite Central Committee, agencies of social distribution in keeping with an equitable moral structure, are likely to find any resistance to full inclusion of Queer folk offensive. For them it will violate their sense of God's presence in the world in terms of equally distributed justice.

5. Tactical

For Mennonites this moral structure is traditionally almost exclusively applied in economic terms. However, American Evangelical and Progressive Christianity have strong traditions of expansion/growth as a moral good. In the last century this perspective has crept into some parts of the Mennonite Church, especially those

advocating greater integration into American cultural norms, either liberal or conservative. In the last fifty years this has shifted to becoming almost exclusively a conservative impetus reflected in the Church Growth movement which has had a very strong impact across Mennonite life. However, there is a tradition within the Mennonite world that says traditions must change in order to ensure the future is open to growth through inclusion of the young people. This has been the basis for much cultural change among Mennonites such as the shift to the use of English.

Applied against inclusion

A common refrain among anti-inclusion Mennonites is that churches rejecting inclusion are bigger/stronger/better than Mennonite churches moving toward inclusion.

Applied for inclusion

Mennonites seeking inclusion have tended to express this moral framework in terms of ensuring the future is open to young people.

Likely outcome for Mennonites

This is not a moral structure that easily reflects Mennonite moral traditions. While it will be used within the discussion, it is not likely to have much traction, either positive or negative. One possibility is that folk within Mennonite institutional structures, both at the congregational and denominational levels, will use this form of moral reasoning as part of their evaluation of the meaning of inclusion. Congregational leaders in urban settings where Queer Mennonites are likely to be found may well find themselves arguing in favour of inclusion on the basis of strengthening congregational life. Oppositionally, denominational leaders who think through this moral structure are likely to find themselves arguing against inclusion on the grounds that it weakens denominational life. However, both arguments are likely to lead to a perceived moral gap between leaders and general Mennonite adherents who are not comfortable with this framework. In as much as anyone argues strongly from this perspective (for inclusion or exclusion) all other Mennonites are likely to perceive that person as immoral. Since this is the normal moral framework of all organizations, in as much as Mennonite organizational figures approach inclusion/exclusion from this perspective they risk delegitimization of themselves and their organizations.

6. Strategic

Mennonites have not traditionally used strategic moral structures. There is no tradition of the type of abstract work necessary. However, in recent years theologians such as Gordon Kaufman and others have moved strongly into this realm of moral thought.

Applied against inclusion

A good example of the use of this moral structure to oppose inclusion is Willard Swartley's *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment* (2003). Swartley argues against the inclusion of Queer folk on the basis of a careful though abstract argument that uses a hetero-normative theology of being (Genesis) to reject Queer participation in the Mennonite church (though it should be noted that the final

section of the book suggests quite a different onto-theology of Church, one inherently biased toward inclusion).

Applied for inclusion

On the other side, C. Norman Kraus has developed a systematic onto-theological approach to sexuality that expresses a morality of inclusion. In *On Being Human: Sexual Orientation and the Image of God* (2011) Kraus argues from a Trinitarian (implicitly Queer) theology of divine being to support Queer inclusion in the Mennonite church.

Likely outcome for Mennonites

Since Mennonites do not have a strong tradition of strategic thinking at any level, let alone the formal theological, this type of thinking is unlikely to have any impact on the long-term struggle, though specific adherents of one position or another might draw upon Swartley or Kraus.

7. Aesthetic

Mennonites have a strong visual-moral aesthetic built around conformity of appearance and a limited palette of colours. There is great beauty and peace in the harmony where each contributes a small piece to the pattern of the mono-chromatic whole and Mennonites have done this very well from the lay-out of farms through styles of dress. There is also a strong tradition of music as representing the fundamental truth of Mennonite existence, whether that musical tradition be plainsong or four-part harmony. In using music Mennonites have been highly responsive to cultural innovations, continuously exploring contemporary music for new aesthetic forms that can be used to joyously and beautifully reflect Mennonite understandings of existence itself. Mennonites have used this aesthetic of highly ordered conformity and musical innovation as a felt expression of divine existence.

Applied against inclusion

The Mennonite aesthetic tradition can easily be applied against inclusion if the focus is on appearance. The Mennonite aesthetic has been relatively monochrome and the very over-against-ness of Queer existence violates this aesthetic. In practical terms, it is often easy to identify Queer folk in congregations and thus to place them against the moral norm of beautiful conformity. For the conformity and order inclined, the intuitive truth of Mennonite existence is the exclusion of Queer folk who appear to break with the type.

Applied for inclusion

The Mennonite aesthetic tradition can easily be applied for inclusion if the focus is on music. Mennonite music has embraced diversity, looking for beauty in every available musical tradition, enthusiastically bringing the best of the globe's musical variety into the life of the church. For the musically inclined the intuitive truth of Mennonite existence is the requirement of inclusion.

Likely outcome for Mennonites

In all likelihood, this moral structure will work toward the inclusion of Queer folk. The aesthetic of monochromatic order and conformity is breaking down across the

Mennonite world. While it still exists in some places, it faces difficulty especially in urban Mennonite churches, or, ironically, those churches most under the influence of American Evangelicalism and church growth theology. The wide variety of dress, hair-style, and personal display welcomed in the context of evangelical outreach cut off one of the central aesthetic objections to Queer participation in conservative churches. On the other hand, the wide range of cultural musical appropriations are implicitly encouraging of the embrace of Queer diversity for the way it expands the metaphoric range of truth within Mennonite circles.

Mennonites moving forward

Mennonites, like others, embrace multiple moral perspectives. Those perspectives, as can be seen, lead to a variety of positions and combinations of positions around Queer inclusion. Currently this variety is tearing at the church leading to deep divisions at many levels. While it is impossible to determine the precise outcome, the rooting of Mennonite ethics in familial, hierarchical, equitable, and aesthetic moral structures leads to the near certainty of a church that welcomes the Queer.

Prescriptions

Ethics must provide prescriptive advice if it is to be meaningful as a human endeavor. But rather than explaining right from wrong, its task must be to assist those involved in the emotional intensity of moral engagement to find ways to recognize the humanity of others and negotiate the engagement in such a way that the smaller and greater human community moves toward peace.

The key to minimizing the conflict as the church struggles is for each person engaged in the struggle, regardless of the perspective, to recognize the inherent need to speak to the others in the moral language that reflects the other's moral framework(s). Each moral structure inherently excludes the moral legitimacy of any of the others at its point of use and this is a powerful unconscious perception that blocks effective communication. Good communication can only happen if like is met with like. With seven moral frameworks possible, and inclusion and exclusion possibilities in every one, the conversational possibilities are complex.

Any successful conversation is going to be slow and involve very careful mediation. In such mediation it will be important to identify all the perspectives, their sources, and their felt experience (all done through careful and formalized listening processes). Such a process of listening helps distance people from the emotional side of the issue and maintain their commitment to mutual humanity. If rational engagement is to be part of the moral engagement it can only happen in the context of such careful and mediated conversation.

Long-Term

Since the Queer are members of the Mennonite family with some already moving into roles in the church hierarchy, are fully justified in doing so by any measure of equitability, and are supported by an aesthetic of musical variety, and this struggle takes place in a surrounding culture that is increasingly Queer inclusive, it is hard to see

how anything other than inclusion can be the outcome. Most of the moral options that would oppose inclusion are either weak or breaking down under cultural pressure. However, the strength of the hierarchical strands of Bible and traditional church life opposed to inclusion mean this transition will not be neat and tidy. It may be protracted and deeply painful. That the hierarchical moral structure is one of the strongest human moral structures and most intuitively opposes inclusion means many will be left confused and wondering if inclusion is as much a sign of moral breakdown as it is a sign of an expanded repertoire of moralities of faithfulness. But the drive of the Queer within the church will be decisive in changing church life for inclusion.

Careful conversation focused on mutual understanding through listening is the most likely to ease the pain of this transition. Such conversation is not easy to foster since the brains of those involved on either side are likely to perceive such a conversation as itself a moral failure (one cannot talk to those who have betrayed the family, abandoned the historical truths, destroyed the sanctity, or behaved in fundamentally discriminatory ways). However, human brains are strongly oriented to finding places of compromise and cooperation and processes that seek out those places of moral unity and frame the conversation from there are the most likely to succeed. One might perhaps begin any efforts at rapprochement with prayer, readings from the gospels and hymn singing and thus make the framing structure that which creates a widespread sense of moral comfort and conformity among Mennonite brains.

Conclusion

A human moral universe with seven fundamental structures, combined in a large number of ways with nearly infinite cultural content predicts a world where moral unity is difficult to obtain. The issue of Queer inclusion in Christian groups is one excellent example of this difficulty, as the case of Mennonites in North America makes clear. Yet discovering the built in structures that cause this situation leads to the possibility of far better understanding of moral development and moral conflict, as well as the greater clarity regarding the options for future development. When we know that we biologically intuit that God is up it becomes possible to rationally explore where God might actually be, and thus to find the unexpected truth beyond our biological existence. So too, we might come to see that morality is best developed in a rational seven-fold form that answers our moral questions, even if it not a simple solution or a quick one. At the very least we can learn to be more patient with each other in the process of developing moral positions, and even that would be a significant advance.

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