

January 2014

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The 'Imago Dei' Campaign

A new group with a message that we are all made in the image of God

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. --1Corinthians 1:17

Another “gay-friendly” faith group was launched last week for the purpose of defusing “heated conversations among Christians on certain polarizing issues; specifically, homosexuality.”¹ *Imago Dei*, a Latin term translated “image of God,” is the name of the organization to be headed by the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference that represents 40,000 churches. Rodriguez says his campaign will affirm the *Imago Dei* in all people, including “victim and perpetrator; citizen and undocumented; believer and unbeliever...” Ibid

Rodriguez hopes to dial-down the “negative rhetoric that seems to captivate and hold hostage, conversations within groups.” He promises his startup organization has nothing to do with the culture wars and has no political agenda. Asked if the Pope motivated the new campaign, Rodriguez said, no, the organization has been coming together for close to a year-and-a-half.

So far, left-leaning news “dotcoms,” are at least, somewhat curious. The *Huffington Post* reports: “Evangelical Campaign Says Everyone, Including Gays, Reflect God’s Image.” A *Time.com* lead says: “The Imago Dei Campaign—Evangelical Groups Say Gays Made in God’s Image.”

Extending best wishes to the startup campaign is Sally Gary, author of “Loves God Likes Girls.” She says “The message is Christ’s message, which is, we’re all one in him.”

Another well-wisher is Alan Chambers, founder of the now-defunct Exodus International. Last year, Chambers shuttered the doors of his organization which had originally been founded to help people overcome same-sex attractions. He says his mission now is to “serve in our pluralistic culture by hosting thoughtful and safe conversations about faith, gender, and sexuality; and partnering with others to establish trust, reduce fear, and inspire hope.” Ibid

Citing faithfulness, commitment and love, trust and fidelity, Chambers says that even in monogamous, long-term faithful same-sex “marriages,” one can find the image of God. “Nowhere in that,” says Chambers, “do I even have to make a judgment on the morality of homosexuality or anything like that.” Ibid

Two other startup groups that are also aiming towards a more reasoned and sensitive public dialogue concerning homosexuality, likewise, claim to operate from a faith-based perspective.

The “NALT (Not All Like That) Christians Project” encourages Christians to publicly declare “that there is nothing anti-biblical or sinful about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Ditto for “The Reformation Project,” whose organizers hope to “reform church teaching on sexual orientation and gender identity.”

While NALT and The Reformation Project affirm practicing homosexuals in the Church, Rodriguez says he simply hopes to end the “rhetorical bullying” and facilitate “redemptive and reconciliatory” interactions—not to “condone any behavior” or “endorse anything that runs counter to a biblical worldview. Although his “messaging” is different, Alan Chambers is excited that the latter affirms the humanity of all people. That, he says, is worth celebrating.

For the record, except for the universally disavowed actions of Fred Phelps and his 20-member Westboro (unaffiliated “Baptist”) Church, we are not aware of ANY Christian groups, organizations, or national spokesmen that harass, threaten, or engage in “rhetorical bullying.” Nor do we hear that sexually active homosexuals are not loved by God and made in His image. A number of Christian-owned businesses, on the other hand, are being sued for preferring not to provide goods or services for “gay-oriented” activities.

But, our concerns do rest with a handful of evangelical leaders, including Jim Daly, James Robison, and Mat Staver, who signed the 2009 “Manhattan Declaration,”² and subsequently, the Imago Dei campaign. In-so-far-as the first plank of the Manhattan Declaration declares “...every human being as a creature fashioned in the very image of God, possesses inherent rights of equal dignity and life,” we wonder at the redundancy. It seems reasonable to ask, since 2009, how is that messaging working? What are the expectations of Imago Dei? Is the complete text of Genesis 1:27 (*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them*) problematic when it comes to “group dialogues?”

Moreover, what purpose is served by attempting to find common ground with “Christian” groups that defend what the Apostle Paul clearly says in Romans 1, is indefensible? It would appear that they are not followers of Christ. But they are a distraction.

David Guzik, Bible commentator and Senior Pastor at Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara, cautions against getting into theological discussions with the *Serpent* (so to speak)—the big mistake that Eve made in the Garden. Satan will always try to undermine God’s people by undermining God’s Word, says Pastor Guzik. “Eve’s knowledge of what she should not do is partially correct, but what she doesn’t seem to know makes her all the more vulnerable to deception.”³

We believe a great deception has gone forth, causing many even in the Church, to think that “truth” must be flexible and in keeping with the times. Were that not so, we would not have witnessed this past year, bans lifted against homosexuals in our armed forces and the Boy Scouts of America, and 13 more states opting for same-sex “marriage.” But, should that constrain the going forth of the Word? Should the salvation message be watered down until those with radically different theological views climb aboard?

One particular portion of the nine-page Manhattan Declaration that encapsulates our thoughts, reads:

“We are Christians who have joined together...to embrace our obligation...to speak and act in defense of these truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers, that no power on earth, be it cultural or political, will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness, both in season and out of season. May God help us not to fail in that duty.”

Following 40 days in the wilderness, His disciples said “*Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Mt 4:17, Mark 1:14). That may have been a bit “polarizing?” Ya think?

Rick Forcier

¹ *The Christian Post*, “Can Another ‘Gay-Friendly’ Faith Group Help Steer the Conversation for Christians on Homosexuality?,” 1/27/2014

² Manhattan Declaration, 11/20/2009, Draft Cmte: Robert George Professor, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University, Timothy George Professor, Beeson Divinity School, Stamford University, Chuck Colson Founder, the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview (Lansdowne, VA)

³ Blue Letter Bible, www.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?bk=0&ch=3 (Genesis 3)