

The Revoice Conference and the Danger of a Big Theological Tent

Last week, a controversial conference was held in St. Louis with the goal of, "Supporting, encouraging and empowering gay, lesbian, same-sex-attracted and other LGBT Christians so they can flourish while observing the historic Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality." It was called Revoice 2018, and it has created a stir among conservative Christians.

On the one hand, the conference founder, Nate Collins, has made clear that, "We all believe that the Bible teaches a traditional, historic understanding of sexuality in marriage, and so we are not attempting in any way to redefine any of those doctrines. We're trying to live within the bounds of historic Christian teaching about sexuality and gender."

Collins has even stated that, "Sexual desire for someone of the same sex is sinful and something that I should repent from."

So, Collins and others involved in Revoice have stated explicitly that they believe that marriage as established by God is exclusively heterosexual, and they agree that homosexual practice is sinful. This is highly significant and should be loudly and openly commended.

These days, all too many professing Christians have denied these fundamental truths, to their own detriment and hurt. Because of that, we should encourage all those who affirm what Scripture so plainly lays out, especially those who struggle with same-sex attraction or gender confusion.

It's also significant that Collins stated that, when it comes to living within the bounds of historic Christian teaching

about sexuality and gender “we find difficulty doing that for a lot of reasons.”

An honest confession like this should elicit a compassionate, non-condemning response from other believers. Living like this cannot be easy, and those of us who cannot personally relate to such struggles should pray for a caring heart, doing whatever we can to offer solidarity and support. (Collins himself struggles with same-sex attractions but is gladly married to a woman.)

But these are not the areas that have stirred controversy and raised concerns. One of the workshops offered in Revoice was titled, “Redeeming Queer Culture: An Adventure.” This was being taught at a conservative Christian conference?

The description is even worse than the title: “For the sexual minority seeking to submit his or her life fully to Christ and to the historic Christian sexual ethic, queer culture presents a bit of a dilemma; rather than combing through and analyzing to find which parts are to be rejected, to be redeemed or to be received with joy (Acts 17:16-34), Christians have often discarded the virtues of queer culture along with the vices, which leaves culturally connected Christian sexual minorities torn between two cultures, two histories, and two communities. So questions that have until now been largely unanswered remain: what does queer culture (and specifically, queer literature and theory) have to offer us who follow Christ? What queer treasure, honor and glory will be brought into the New Jerusalem at the end of time (Rev. 21:24-26)?”

Since “queer” speaks of something contrary to God’s order, something sinful and wrong, even something perverse, there are no virtues to be found in it and there will be no “queer treasure, honor and glory” that “will be brought into the New Jerusalem at the end of time.”

In fact, Revelation 21:27, the very next verse after the

passage quoted on the Revoice website, reads, “No unclean thing shall ever enter it, nor shall anyone who commits abomination or falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”

There will be plenty of people redeemed out of queer culture who will enter the heavenly city, but nothing “queer” will enter there, for sure. And there’s no way a follower of Jesus should identify as “queer.” That is who some of us once were.

Some would argue that those on the margins—including those in the “queer” community—learn to care for others who are marginalized. But this is not a virtue unique to queer culture. Rather, it it’s a virtue found in many communities, since within every culture and community, there are positive aspects to be found. Yet we don’t speak about the “adventure” of redeeming aspects of the KKK culture, or the Satanist culture, or the terrorist culture, or the drug culture, or the greedy business culture or the gambling culture.

When asked about Revoice’s use of the word “queer,” Collins explained, “Personally, I think that while the language of queerness can point to real things that we experience and that we’re trying to make sense of, I don’t think it’s the most helpful theologically. But, again, that’s a conversation that I think needs to happen, and I want it to happen in the context of involving people who do use that language. I want there to be consensus about these matters. So that means trying to be a big tent for a certain group of people to participate and come together.”

In reality, that is the guaranteed way to fail, since when you open the door this wide for respectful interaction, you give legitimacy to illegitimate viewpoints. In other words, Revoice was not a place for theological debate. It was billed as a place where people who identify as LGBTQ+ and Christian can share their viewpoints and find “consensus.”

This would be like welcoming Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists into an interfaith dialogue with Christians, saying, "We want to move towards a consensus in our jointly-held beliefs." To do so is to make concessions and to validate invalid beliefs.

In the same way, much of the terminology used by Revoice speakers and presenters affirms LGBTQ+ talking points in unhelpful and even dangerous ways. A big tent like this is destined to collapse quickly.

Note again this sentence from the "Redeeming Queer Culture" workshop: "Christians have often discarded the virtues of queer culture along with the vices, which leaves culturally connected Christian sexual minorities torn between two cultures, two histories and two communities."

To the contrary, the call for every disciple is to deny oneself, take up the cross, leave everything and follow Jesus (see Luke 14:25-33). It is not to be "torn between two cultures, two histories and two communities." It is to embrace the new and leave the old behind—which means leaving the old ways and mindset and culture and identification behind. Then, in newness of life, we reach back into the old to redeem those who are still trapped and lost.

Even the concept of LGBTQ+ individuals as being part of a "sexual minority" raises all kinds of red flags, as if sinful temptations and disordered desires grant someone a "minority" status.

To underscore these problems, some solid Christian conservatives, Peter LaBarbera and Stephen Black, were banned from attending the conference. And this despite Collins saying, "Our first value is explicitly the historic Christian teaching about marriage and sexuality. And so anybody who adheres to that is welcome at Revoice and, I would say, should find some kind of a home there." (LaBarbera's website is Americans for Truth about Homosexuality. Black is ex-gay with

a powerful testimony. For an insightful critique about Revoice from the world's top scholar on homosexuality and the Bible, see [here](#).)

This alleged big tent apparently did not have room for solid voices like those of LaBarbera and Black even to attend. Yet it had plenty of room for ideas that have no place in a Christian conference.

And so, with love and respect for all committed Christians who struggle with same-sex attractions or gender confusion, I point back to the words of Jesus, which remain relevant to this hour: "Enter at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who are going through it, because small is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

We do not want to push you away, but we must warn you of the danger of making the gate too wide and the way too broad.