

A Psychodynamic Understanding of the Strong Objections to Same-Sex Marriages

What makes the current dialogue difficult within the church community is that the word God as highest authority is invoked. From a psychological point of view I hear also the voice of the superego speaking when the word God is uttered. At the risk of simplifying matters I distinguish between two kinds of superego: the collective superego and a personal superego.

The voice of the collective superego is the voice of culture, religion, common wisdom, public opinion, shared reality, etc. The best and strongest voices of our current culture, the highest courts in the land and the leadership of our churches, have spoken of full equality, and yet condemnation that evokes God as the highest authority is still strong. I have the suspicion that it is not the collective superego that is speaking today but the voice of the personal superego.

What is speaking now is a personal superego and that makes the current dialogue so acrimonious. I may call this also a transpersonal superego because many people, particularly men, are listening to this voice from within.

Where does this voice come from? This superego is instilled in the child by a caregiver who was not in tune with the child as the recipient of love and concern; the caregiver cemented the enforcement of rules and requirements on the child as the condition of being loved. In order to obtain a small portion of love and care the child learned to obey, and because of his yearning for love the child introjected his caregiver in the form of the superego. I paraphrase a simile that Freud used in a similar context. The child says to the father/mother: "Listen, if you cannot fully love me I take you in, and because then I am like you, you will love me." Thus the superego is formed and projected onto the outside world. Religious people seem to be prone to unconsciously connect this hostile superego within them with the voice of God. This identification provides security and cohesiveness for a fragile and vulnerable self. All seems to fit: relentless talk about sin, the inability to receive and to grant forgiveness, the hiding behind rules, regulations, statutes, traditions, laws and doctrines. It is not the gospel that matters but the "law" in different shapes and forms.

The formation of a collective superego is an achievement that allows for the enjoyment of culture and religion, but a personal superego may serve as a defense rather than as an agent of spiritual and emotional development.

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