



EUROPEAN FORUM OF LESBIAN, GAY
BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER
CHRISTIAN GROUPS

BARCELONA 2010

ROUNDTABLE 25/6/2010

Deconstructing patriarchy in order to build up the Realm of God of LGBT Human Rights?

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DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY.

1. Patriarchy : a type of gender relationships related to sexual difference.

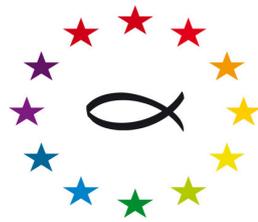
I understand patriarchy as the description of a type of relationships among people which comes out of the systematically and unjustified dominance of men upon women and the preferently positive evaluation of what is considered as typically male as opposed to what is considered typically female. Nowadays there is a widespread justified conviction that this is the result of a biased perception of reality and of the way coexistence is organized. So, this “bias” needs to be deconstructed. Since this is not a case of “throwing everything overboard” without any purpose other than changing, I’ll try to expose the foundations of patriarchy as a biased result of sexual difference, and, from the field of biological anthropology, try to see how to match human sexual difference with the ethical imperative of equality and then (see) which cautions are required.

2. Sexuality is one of the “three legs”, essential to the balance in the stool of life.

Life is basically set up through some genetic information that spreads out in multiple, successive and integrated dimensions which result in morphology, physiology, behaviour, and so on. Of animals, sustenance requires some basic behaviour essential for survival. This behaviour is ruled by a neural hardware (mainly based on the hypothalamus in vertebrates, mammals, primates...) which ensures that this behaviour is followed without endangering the survival it guarantees. The three basic forms of behaviour that essentially guarantee the balance in the stool of life are: a) the defence and protection of the individual against the risks posed by the environment, if one cannot guarantee this, the risk of not surviving would be excessive; b) food, without which individual life is directly jeopardized; and c) sexuality, which is the basic mechanism of reproduction in most living species; without which the future of the species is at jeopardy.

The regulation of sexual difference is one of the most brilliant and varied aspects shown by the spread of life along the evolution span. Its study entails an amazing degree of fineness and complexity and it is worth noticing the immense availability of energy and strategies that life can deploy in this respect. That has made us think, since Darwin, that sexuality responds to some specific mechanisms of selection that Darwin himself pointed out and that are still being passionately debated nowadays.

From a technical point of view, there are two sexes in nature and evolutive mathematics prove that no more than two can possibly exist. There can be though more than two types of individuals according the sexual features they show (monosexual of either sex, stable or



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changing hermaphrodites, depending on different biological criteria, non reproducing sexes, and so on...) All this depends on the species under study and we can never generalize from some species to others.

3. Tributary humans, like any other living beings inside the great framework of sexuality in life. Which are the biological elements that condition sexuality?

Sexuality is a general pattern of life that in no way is a human peculiarity. That means that although we humans take it for something original, sexuality is deeply rooted in the general biological planning of nature.

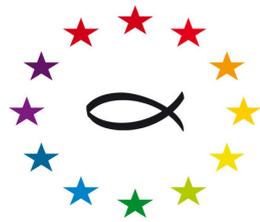
In most vertebrates, mammals and primates- and therefore humans as well- the regulation of sexual difference is based on a chromosomal difference in thickness. Males and females are different because of a chromosome. This is a radical and very important difference. We know well what a whole chromosome of difference implies. In the sexual couple, the man is XY and the woman is XX. From the very first moment of their biological origin, human beings have been clearly sexually classified, except for some margins of variability in statistical distribution. This variability appears differently depending on the level to analyze (genetic, morphological, behaviourist etc.)

Actually, sexual difference is the only clear-cut difference by means of which humans can be coherently grouped into two clear sets out of their biological elements. All the others (for example skin colour, body shape, intellectual skills) are under discussion and difficult to establish. In the case of sexuality any nucleated cell of the organism allows for a clear classification as male or female, except for some uncommon cases, which stem from chromosomic pathologies.

This undisputed genetically difference also appears quite clearly in many objectivable morphological and physiological aspects of the brain and of the behaviour build up. The brain is slightly differentiated in connection with sex, as in many other structures (for example the cardiovascular system seems to be somehow protected by female estrogens). But this brain differences are much less significant than those in genitalia. These differences do not imply at all being better or worse. But behaviour and brain capacity are less subject to difference than genetics or certain aspects of physiology (for example hormonal irrigation). This means that a differential classification of sexual behaviour cannot be as easily made as in the case of sexual genetics. The farther a particular parameter goes away from biology, the more flexible and agile it appears to be. So, as an example, emotional behaviour seems to be more dependent on sexual difference than behaviour depending on reason. No biological reality is likely to be absolutely not dependent on sexual difference. After all, animals are mainly the result of biology, and the mental world is heavily dependent on the brain, which is one of the viscera.

4. In general, it is common for vertebrates, mammals and primates to show male dominance in the fields or social, hierarchical or food relations.

In the animal world males usually show certain superiority over females in the use of force. This is because of their stronger muscle power and perhaps of a stronger disponibility of their force when it comes to competing, securing their territory, and so on. This physical strength is related with testosterone, which is efficient in producing muscle mass and probably also in ruling aggressive forms of behaviour. As mentioned before, Darwinism has traditionally studied the so called sexual selection, which is considered one of the sources for keeping sexual difference through the selection of differentiating factors. Females are particularly prepared for the reproductive functions, for which they hold very specific and efficient suitability's. These reflections generally, though not always, apply to the world of mammals and primates.



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5. Human uniqueness and the values of equality.

Humans are clearly original from the animal world because of the mind, reasoning, conscience and culture. But these features don't cancel out their dependence on biology, which is naturally still exerting its influence. Let's take food for example. When it comes to nutrition we may have modified many things but we still ingest and digest following very classical animal routines. In the case of relational behaviour, humans are heavily dependent on the production of values. This is especially clear in relation to the use of violence, the distribution of resources and obviously the relationships between individuals and specifically the relationship between sexes. Traditionally, men have ruled human relationships. This is because of many reasons, but two of them stand out: the use of force and violence in the arrangement of society (this way men win) and the heavy restraints of reproduction that shaped women's life until recently.

The use of force as a social resource has fortunately declined. As it dramatically has women's reproductive dependence due to the decrease of infant deaths and of birth rates, as a result of widespread health improvement in the demographic transition period. As the joint result in the change of these two parameters, the presence of women in society has normalized, thus favouring the recognition of equality and full social participation. These moves stand for quite a favourable situation in deconstructing patriarchy.

The value of equality, fostered by many great traditions, and especially by the evangelical tradition, has been able to materialize more clearly, among other causes, by the initiative set up by societies, which in spite of being secular, have been inspired by the Christian tradition and consequently have put these teachings into practice. (The so called Western World in general)

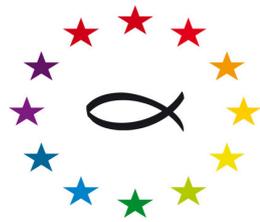
6. The values of equality, a typical proposal of the evangelical world and the New Testament.

Sure enough, the proposal for equality that may overcome differences is clearly expressed in the New Testament, although it may not have been put into practice. Having in mind its historical context, no doubt the original Christian texts promote a kind of social equality for sexes which looks quite surprising for that time. This proposal, which should have been followed and spread by the society which called itself Christian, faded out and even nowadays, when our society is obviously sensitive to the criteria of equality in the dignity of sexes, the Catholic Church stands out as an institution that discriminates because of sex. Other Christian churches have taken more daring steps in that field.

7. How to match equality with the richness of difference. (Difference enriches life, as proved by the ecosphere)

Patriarchy stands for an asymmetrical approach to human relations in favour of men. Its reformulation implies the need to rule this (in this case sexual) difference, without denying it, and avoiding any thoughts of inferiority or superiority.

Difference means richness in all areas, and fear of difference, also in all areas, springs from the fear that difference may entail superiority. For example in ecology and biodiversity, difference is a great treasure. The beauty of the desert (I am thinking of the desert in South Algeria, universal heritage) does not only pose any threats to the beauty of the Amazon forest, just to mention an example, but it guarantees their mutual contrast. What advantage would we have if animals and plants were all the same? In sex, which richness would come out of suppressing sexual difference? The point is obviously to put the dignity of differences on the same level.



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In reference to biological difference, biology deals with it. Some cultural intervention may be required, for example the excessive use of estrogens or oestrogen-like hormones in nature may alter the biological structure of sex. (A survey carried out in the Thames showed that fish had their sexual constitution altered because of the rests of contraceptive pills dumped into the river through the urine of women who took them and which went down the sewers). These are destructuring interventions.

In relation with the difference in experience and behaviour, I think that these should not only be kept, but also channelled, strictly avoiding their turning into privilege or contempt for anybody. It is difficult to comment on each specific parameter, since they have all been used to put scorn on women, and their mere mentioning brings to mind a point of view of male superiority.

It is for example usual to comment that men usually have a higher capacity for orientation in space (which would be a neurological register kept in men's "hardware" for their thousand or million-year-old dedication to hunting), while women would feel more at ease and would be more skilful in nearby spaces (for their thousand or million-year-old dedication to short distances). By saying this, one might conclude that men will be encouraged to go to public spaces and women to remain in their households, forgetting that both spaces have their advantages and disadvantages, and that both sexes have to work together in common spaces. This applies to any sort of reflection, and this way specific observations must be taken with caution. Something similar happens if we notice that women (like all mammal females) are spectacularly skilful in bringing up their little children, but it sounds as if by pointing out this feature, we are bound to assume that men can ignore their role as fathers when it is their turn. The right criteria would be to do the things all together, each of us contributing not only with our own sexual characteristics as well as with any others we may have in other social fields.

8. A pending job: constantly to work out humanizing relationships..

Humanization is the cultural by-product of hominization (an evolutive process with biological roots) Such humanization of the hominids requires a double activity:

- a) individual effort so that the most primary impulses of animal kind (physical aggressivity, biological hierarchical structures, imposing archaic sexual pressure and so on) can be harnessed by the most elaborate aspects of human mind, specifically by those elaborations concerning the frontal lobes, an aspect which takes into account values such as equality, relationships based on respect and dialogue, participative and cross relational structures and respect for personal conscience.
- b) b) social effort so that the cultural and social environments can follow those values. That means that the educational criteria, the media, the opinion of those socially in charge, the organized structures of society, etc. should vouch for and express these values, avoiding any flagrant contradictions. It does not make much sense to say that our society is socially egalitarian, while the most prestigious dailies advertise lists of the female prostitution market.

The individuals in particular and the society as a whole must willingly get involved in the task of promoting respect and equality, having in mind that this task will never "be ready and finished", but each generation should bear witness and go on with the effort. When the job of the humanizing regulation of the biological structure that holds us is thought as finished we are bound to suffer the risk of having the archaic mechanisms come back, with their dependence on the most "animal" aspects we have inherited through evolution.