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Sir Elton John Opposes Organized Religion

by Douglas A. Sylva

The point of this column is to convince you that it is worth contemplating the cultural significance of Elton John. But this is not a musical review -- we should be interested in his statements, not his songs. In an interview in a British magazine, John said that, "From my point of view I would ban religion completely. I think religion has always tried to turn hatred towards gay people. Religion promotes hatred and spite against gays."

At first glance, such sentiments could be dismissed because they emanate from the world of pop culture. But pop culture is of course short for popular culture; popular culture represents what most people prefer as entertainment, and it shapes how many people think and what many people believe.

But besides that, BBC News captured the influence that John actually possesses in its headline for the story "Sir Elton: Ban Organized Religion." Elton John is called "Sir" because in 1998 Queen Elizabeth II named him a knight of the British Empire; pop culture has in fact become the culture of the realm. John called for banning the exercise of religion, but he will remain a knight in good standing. Imagine if some other sir called for the banning of homosexual activity -- his title would no doubt be in jeopardy. What this signifies is that homosexuality, as a philosophy or world view, is now more powerful than Christianity. Homosexuality is protected by the state and by mainstream culture, down to the level of individual thought, while it is not only acceptable but fashionable to attack Christianity. And it is people like Elton John who have made it so.

In his interview, John voiced the basic belief of homosexuality as philosophy: "Nothing should be an issue when it comes to sexuality in the first place. Sexuality is the private domain of consenting adults, and there exist no grounds for one adult to question, never mind criticize, another adult's choices."

This is more revolutionary than it first appears (perhaps because we are so used to it already). Since at least the time of St. Augustine, deviations from sexual morality were treated with the familiar dictum, love the sinner, hate the sin. This allowed for an important balance: neither compassion nor ethical standards need be sacrificed for the other. But this has been overthrown -- and in fact is as obsolete as the quill Augustine used to write it down -- by the philosophy that there is no separation between sinner and sin -- we are what we do -- and what we do is not a sin.

The triumph of this philosophy is apparent in another section of the interview. The interviewer, who is also a musician, stated that, "We played a show in Ireland last summer and I had the weirdest experience: this mother, father and son came backstage." John responded: "and you f___ all of them (laughs)." Even the interviewer appeared startled, and said, "No I didn't. No I didn't -- [the son] was 18." And then John said, "He was legal." All is fair game, all is allowed; there need not even be a nod to traditional decency.

Another sign of the ascendancy of the homosexual philosophy is John's willingness to tell Christians what Christianity should be, to tell them what they must believe in order to remain in good standing with him and with the dominant culture he now represents: "From my point of view I would ban religion completely, even though there are some wonderful things about it. I love the idea of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the beautiful stories about it, which I loved in Sunday school and I collected all the little stickers and put them in my book. But the reality is that organized religion doesn't seem to work. It turns people into hateful lemmings and it's not really compassionate." He is offering Christians a vision of a tame Christianity -- everybody put your

stickers in your books -- that is compatible with his worldwide. Does he believe that he is being compassionate to Christians, offering them a version of their own beliefs that would not warrant banning or persecution?

It does not appear that Christian leaders understand this threat, since not one of them responded publicly to John. Either that or they already fear John and all of the accumulated power of his media and political empire (he said in the interview that he will be traveling to Poland to address that country's unacceptable beliefs). Near the end of the interview, John said that, "People come to me and I'm a bit like the Queen Mother. I don't know what it is with me; people treat me very reverently." It is ironic to note that the word "reverence" used to be reserved for God and his leaders on earth, and that it derives from the Latin verb "to fear".