

# "Queer-Baiting..." Reconsidered

In February of 1973 *The Alternative* featured two essays in its "PERSPECTIVES" forum on homosexuality and the significance of the family. Each was independently written. David Brudnoy in "Queer-Baiting for Faith, Fun, and Profit" presented the case against age-old social and legal proscription of homosexuality. Gary North in "The Perseverance of the Family" outlined the importance of the family in western tradition, and mentioned toleration of homosexuality as an attendant danger to familial ties.

Over the following months we noticed an unusually impassioned response to Brudnoy's side of PERSPECTIVES—some readers reacting favorably, some unfavorably. Due to such interest, we have decided to publish in this issue two reasonably erudite refutations of Brudnoy's essay, one written by John Randolph, the other by E.T. Veal. It should be noted that the writer of the first article is an associate to a public official. He writes under the name "John Randolph" to avoid confusing his views with those of his employer.

These two replies are followed in turn by an answer from David Brudnoy himself.

**John Randolph:**

## "Say It Ain't So, Dave"

I have a friend who is an alcoholic. He has one of the best minds I have encountered; he is charming, kindhearted, and the best of company. Indeed, drink seems to bring out the best in him, the sort of stream-of-consciousness, slap-on-the-back good fellowship which is perhaps most appealing to those of us to whom it doesn't come naturally. He is one of the most dangerous people I know.

He is one of those who sings the praises of booze, who will defend it on every aesthetic and intellectual ground. And he paints such an attractive picture that if I had a fourteen-year-old son, I would do what I could to prevent him from ever meeting my witty, wonderful friend the drunk.

Because I *know* he's wrong. Because I have seen what alcohol does to people. Within their own closed system, the arguments for alcohol addiction are irrefutable: the true Bacchist believer would rather have full life than long life, would rather die from a distant cirrhosis than a nine-to-five nervous breakdown. If his addiction makes it difficult for him to function well in society, there is something wrong with society. All a matter of aesthetics. Yet somehow, I *know* my position on this is more important, more obviously right than my preference for blue over yellow.

It is in this light that one must approach David Brudnoy's article against "Queer-Baiting." Here is one of the most lucid, creative writers we have seen—and one of ours—writing a piece that starts off as a hasty prospectus for Special Seminar 101a, Gaiety and its Oppressors in Medieval Spain; that winds up as an exhortation to the "American homosexual revolution" to observe the correct strategy and tactics; that is, alas, deadily dull throughout.

The trouble with the history lesson is that Brudnoy lacks perspective. Cheek-by-jowl with sweeping truisms ("The European Middle Ages were in many ways far less grim than the designation 'Dark Ages' would have us believe..."),

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**E. T. Veal:**

## "Let's Be Reasonable"

In his zeal to dispel prejudices against homosexuality, David Brudnoy has adopted an unfortunate tactic. Where he might have applied reason to a highly emotional subject by demonstrating, if he could, the irrationality of antihomosexual attitudes, he has chosen instead to instill new prejudices by hurling abuse at opponents of his own position. Like those liberals who fancy that the way to end racial prejudice is to create guilt feelings in whites, Professor Brudnoy seems to think that the mistreatment of sexual deviates will end as soon as enough of *The Alternative's* "particular readership of largely younger people" comes to associate critics of homosexuality with witch hunters, anti-Semites, the Inquisition, Joe McCarthy, the Communist Party, "unresolved sexual cravings," the God of the Old Testament, and Queen Victoria.

Almost entirely avoided is the first question that needs to be asked about any human practice, sexual or otherwise—can this practice or conduct or custom be morally justified? Until the practice has been judged, it is fatuous to judge the practitioners.

Western society has, as Professor Brudnoy laments, judged the morality of homosexual practices. As far back as we have evidence, that judgement has been unfavorable to homosexuality, although the treatment meted out to homosexual individuals has varied widely. Where the principle of *quidquid nefas, prohibeat lex* has prevailed, the life of the homosexual has often been harassed and desperate; in more libertarian climes, the law may be less harsh, though public opinion can be as coercive as legal sanctions; and even in the most "open" and "tolerant" societies, a known homosexual is likely to be about as popular and sought-after as a known cardsharp or a known alcoholic.

Professor Brudnoy has every right to oppose his judgment of the moral question to western society's. The *consensus omnium gentium* is hardly infallible, and it may well be wrong about sexual

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**David Brudnoy:**

## In Response

It is a testament to the continued antihomosexuality abroad in the land, that these letters by "John Randolph" and E.T. Veal are granted such a largish chunk of space in this magazine, in response to my article last February discussing the historical treatment of homosexuals and calling for an enlightened view. That I accept the editor's invitation to respond to their rejoinders does not indicate that either this magazine or the conservative movement in general is about to seriously reconsider their accustomed attitude. I note here, at the start, my continued allegiance to the conservative movement, especially to its libertarian strand, while asserting, once more, that the "conservative" attitude toward the matter at hand is, and will likely remain for some time yet, unconscionable. Let us speed, then, to the letters by Messrs. "Randolph" and Veal.

"Randolph" begins anecdotally, the better to let fly with the *ad hominem*. Note the implied syllogism: Since "Randolph's" friend the alcoholic is charming, and since he might charm "Randolph's" hypothetical teen-age son and lead him down the primrose path; therefore, by all means, the alcoholic friend must be kept from the company of the teen-ager. Analogy: Since Brudnoy is "lucid, creative" (etc.), and since there are young people reading Brudnoy's "Queer-Baiting..." piece; therefore, "Randolph" must rush to the rescue lest Brudnoy corrupt the young. It is, I fear, a failed attempt to be witty ("Randolph," that is, essays the wit) and neatly sets the whole argument off on a most unpleasant footing.

I am not surprised that "Randolph" never "thought much about homosexuality" until "Gay Liberationists and their admirers [of whom, incidentally, I am not one, except insofar as I share their desire for equality for homosexuals under the law and civilized attitudes among the citizenry] started calling it to my attention." I needn't mention the Negro civil rights movement, need I?

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RANDOLPH  
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he will treat us to statistics on homosexuals burned, scourged, or sent to the galleys by various kings and queens. He compares homosexuality with heresy in such a way as to imply that the two phenomena were about equally important to the antecedent cultures of modern civilization. That's a little like saying that the second-greatest problem in America today is bigotry against Filipinos.

The theoretical portion of Brudnoy's article suffers from the same myopia: his thesis is that we repress homosexuality because we suffer from a gnawing, pervasive fear of it. Frankly, I never thought much about homosexuality one way or another until Gay Liberationists and their admirers started calling it to my attention. Looking back to my childhood, I can recall a much more vivid fear of being carried off by Martians than of becoming a queer. The only time I seriously considered the possibility was when I read somewhere, a couple of years ago, that it is normal to experience a homosexual "phase" in childhood, and that adult homosexuality may occur when one somehow skips this earlier stage. Not having enjoyed a "normal" childhood in this respect, I worried for a week or so about someday succumbing to this glandular tyranny, until distracted by more imminent concerns.

My principal quarrel with Brudnoy's article is not that he requires libertarian conservatives to endorse the legalization of homosexual relationships between consenting adults. This is an area where the state has no business proscribing, regulating, licensing, or subsidizing. But I endorse, perhaps more heartily than Mr. Brudnoy, his afterthought to the effect that this is a "peripheral" issue. It is neither a cardinal precept of conservative philosophy, nor an issue which I would care to highlight in efforts to recruit new blood into the movement. Although as a libertarian I do accept the theoretical wisdom of legalizing homosexual acts, as a practical matter I think we should divert our resources to it only after we have succeeded in de-controlling gold, guns, grass, and gambling; and shortly before the crusade to auction off the highways.

I utterly reject, however, the notion that because we defend a man's right to do as he pleases, we have any obligation to conceal our disapproval of his actions. Yet this is what Brudnoy is angling for: "not only equality under law, but in attitudes as well." He rejects the idea that homosexuality is a mental or physiological disorder, and ridicules those who take this position, carting out the old saw about Salem witch-hunters.

Those who endorse a libertarian theory of government must be prepared to answer some very tough questions about the feasibility of applying free-market policies to real, dynamic societies. The most telling argument I have encountered against libertarian polity is frequently raised by traditionalists: While there may indeed be a "free market of ideas" those qualities which make

an idea popular are not necessarily the qualities inherent in truthful, beautiful, or even useful ideas. For example: were it not for the influence of church and family, few of us would believe in Hell. It's a pretty unappealing idea, and unfettered by it we could all live more liberated lives. On a free market of ideas, the concept of Hell would be sold short. But the existence or nonexistence of Hell (or of a communist conspiracy, or of the atom) has nothing to do with how many people believe in it. Nor does pure reason yield the answers: I cannot prove that Tahiti is more beautiful than Jersey City, or Bach more talented than the Monkees; but these are things I know.



Nor can I prove the superiority of the lifestyle I espouse over the one Brudnoy seems to endorse. Family life, the interrelation of love and sex and childbearing, the joyful mysteries of masculinity and femininity—these seem so natural and beautiful to me that I can't believe they are the result of mere social conditioning. I know no conclusive rebuttal to those who maintain that homosexuality is "natural" because it seems to come naturally to them: but I view homosexual tendencies in the same light as the urge to murder: something which recurs in men on occasion, for reasons unknown, which they ought to repress in themselves. Government is the proper instrument for the repression of murder, because a murderer directly deprives his victim of a fundamental right. Government ought not to prevent homosexual acts by force, insofar as they do not violate the rights which government is bound to protect. But insofar as I construe homosexuality in those around me as detracting from my enjoyment of life, it is my right to discourage homosexuality by every means, save only force, at my disposal.

Whether I choose to exercise my right to harass homosexuals depends largely on whether I feel they are threatening my own way of life. The closet queens, or the quaint inhabitants of the Fire Island colony, don't bother me, because they do not seek to proselytize. Only when they enter into my orbit, when they threaten the tendency of my society to cohere, will I retaliate.

Gay Liberation is justification; it is proselytization. I do not believe that men are perfect, and I have no doubt that there are those who can learn the art of digging out and exploiting the

perversities which are latent in human nature. No doubt we will soon witness the advent of Bestial Lib, whose leaders will demand their own exotic lounges at Columbia, whose spokesmen will proclaim that you can have a "natural" relationship with a billygoat, whose armbands will declare them "Funny and Proud." I won't be able to prove them wrong, but the first time one of them writes an article in *The Alternative* demanding an end to our condescending attitude toward Funny People, I will cancel my subscription.

As for Brudnoy's picture of a "viable, cohesive society" in which homosexuals with "honest, non-aggressive pride" live side-by-side with their straight brethren, I am skeptical. Just as red-blooded boys were trying to persuade young ladies of the wisdom of Sexual Freedom long before it was formalized into a Movement, so the Gay and Proud set, even if they could shed their obnoxious political affectations, would continue to solicit for new memberships. And people like me would continue to be disgusted.

Like my friend the crusading alcoholic, Brudnoy makes an internally consistent case; and since he's one of the quickest, sharpest people I've met, I would probably enjoy a long, friendly theoretical argument with him. But the moment he tries to convince a son or a dear friend of mine of the Pride that goes with being Gay—the moment he threatens the cohesion of the world that matters to me—I shall be forced to conclude that, while I deplore the methods the Inquisitors used to purge the homosexuals who threatened their way of life, at least their hearts were in the right place. □

VEAL  
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deviation. Perhaps a close examination of this subject would show that the condemnation of homosexuality is inconsistent with more basic moral premises, and that prejudices based on sexual preferences are no more rational than prejudices based on skin color.

I say, *perhaps* a close examination would come to such conclusions. Unfortunately, Professor Brudnoy conducts no examination at all. Let us consider as examples two areas where he approaches the arguments against homosexuality and both times skirts them.

(1) "The Roman Catholic Church until the late Middle Ages opposed homosexuality not only (or even primarily) because it was abnormal or unnatural, but also because it satisfied carnal lust and yielded bodily pleasure." Whereupon follows a torrent of misinformation about medieval Christian views of sex, finished off (after a digression on the ancient Greeks and Romans) with Professor Brudnoy's "guess" that "Judeo-Christian sex-suppression may result from unresolved sexual cravings."

As a grab bag of historical errors, this little excursus is marvelous. As argument—well, it *isn't* argument. Of the three reasons suggested for medieval

Christian opposition to homosexuality, two—"it was abnormal or unnatural"—are not referred to again. The third is enlarged upon at some length, but only with a view to discovering its historical cause—"the ascetic ideal derived from Platonism, which had crept into Christianity via Saint Paul"—and subconscious motivation—"unresolved sexual cravings." All this is psychological speculation, not a logical exposure of medieval fallacies. The reader receives neither a clear account of the bases of the position that Professor Brudnoy is denouncing, nor his reasons for denouncing it.

The formal error is aggravated by a material one: Professor Brudnoy's "Middle Ages" are an imaginary epoch, and his version of Christian theology is equally imaginary. Is it true, as Professor Brudnoy asserts repeatedly, that traditional Christianity in general and the medieval Church in particular have condemned sexual activity on the ground that sex is pleasurable? If it is not true, Professor Brudnoy's discussion recedes even further from the realm of rational argument.

Before examining the evidence on this specific question, I should like to devote a moment to undermining the faith of any readers who may think that, because Professor Brudnoy teaches history, he must know what he is talking about when he discusses the Middle Ages. Professor Brudnoy is not a specialist in medieval European history (medieval Japan is more his place, I believe), and his wildly inaccurate generalizations suggest that he is not even a moderately well-informed amateur.

His statement that "By the tenth century, woman's subjection as a chattel-slave was virtually complete" will serve as an example. No doubt a women's liberationist would disapprove of many aspects of medieval life, but "chattel-slave" is ludicrous. Such was not even the theoretical position of women. One of the great medieval text writers states: "She was formed from the man's side, to show that she was created for his consort, lest perchance, if she had been made from his head, she should seem to be preferred above him in domination; or, if from his feet, then to be subject to him in slavery." (Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, quoted in G.G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama*, p. 622.)

And so little was subjection the rule in practice that the vigor and influence of women are commonplaces of medieval history and literature. Dorothy Sayers, whose credentials as a medievalist are better than either Professor Brudnoy's or mine, went so far as to declare that the role of women in the Middle Ages was greater than in modern society. (See her essay "Are Women Human?" in *Unpopular Opinions*.) This is not to say that men regarded women as fully their equals (hierarchy, not equality, was the governing idea of the age), nor to deny that some aspects of medieval belief offered a certain encouragement to misogyny. But someone who asserted that women in the Middle Ages were fully "equal" and "liberated" would come far

nearer the truth than does Professor Brudnoy.

Similarly, Professor Brudnoy lumps the Middle Ages with "the centuries of witch-hunting," suggesting that the widespread and hysteria-tinged witch trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have a great deal in common with the infrequent medieval prosecutions (which were often political in character). In particular, the heavy emphasis upon the sexual elements of witchcraft is absent in the earlier period. Jeanne d'Arc's inquisitors wanted the details of her religious visions, where a seventeenth century prosecutor would have demanded tales of diabolic copulation.

This pair of examples will, I trust, demonstrate that Professor Brudnoy's broad historical statements are not to be trusted. Their grain of truth is smothered by chaff. Now let us consider the question initially proposed. First, as to the position of medieval theologians, C.S. Lewis provides a convenient summary in *The Allegory of Love*, pp. 14-17, which I shall follow here: "It will be seen that the medieval theory finds room for innocent sexuality: what it does not find room for is passion . . ." Two propositions were universally agreed upon—first, that the sexual impulse, being created by God, was intrinsically good; second, that the weakness of human nature, resulting from the Fall, had disordered sexual life and involved it in certain evils.

Pleasure, however, was not one of those evils. A near approach to such a



view occurs in the *Sententiarum Summa*, attributed to Hugo of St. Victor, which contends that sexual pleasure is "evil, but not morally evil: it is . . . not a sin but the punishment of sin, and thus [the work] arrives at the baffling conception of a punishment which consists in a morally innocent pleasure." But the weightier voice of Albertus Magnus repudiates such curiosities: "He sweeps away the idea that the pleasure is evil or a result of the Fall: on the contrary, pleasure would have been greater if we had remained in Paradise."

The evil that the medieval theologians did find in sex was the sort of overmastering desire that led to *ligamentum rationis*, the cutting off of rational activity, and to the elevation of what is good above what is the First Good. Still, even this evil aspect of sex is, according to Albertus Magnus and Saint Thomas, not a moral evil; it is a misfortune, like pain

or disease, not a sin. All the orthodox Christian writers of this period are agreed that the sexual act, in its proper sphere, is not only innocent, but meritorious.

The opinions which Professor Brudnoy ascribes to the Middle Ages were not orthodox Christian ones. But it is true that they were espoused—by the loathed Manichee sects that were the objects of the Albigensian Crusade. The popular connection between heresy and homosexuality, which bulks so large in Professor Brudnoy's mind, arose precisely because *the most notorious medieval heretics themselves* preached that the means of procreation were evil and that for them, to use Professor Brudnoy's words, "homosexuality [was] a convenient, if unworthy, alternative." (Cf. S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, pp. 176-177.)

Enough has been said, I trust, to show that Professor Brudnoy's first contact with the rational case against homosexuality is mishandled. He conjures up an imaginary dragon, then neglects to slay even that poor creature. But he has accomplished something. He has insinuated to his readers (of whose youth, remember, he is fully aware) that to oppose homosexuality is to associate oneself with a nefarious intellectual milieu, in which innocent pleasures are thought evil, women are reduced to chattel-slavery, witches are pursued by prurient inquisitors, and sexual eccentrics are unfairly branded with accusations of heresy. Anyone who swallows this pack of libels is likely in the future to approach the question of homosexuality with less, rather than more, reason and detachment.

(2) Later on, Professor Brudnoy appraises the views of "American psychiatric opinion, which is the brainchild of the liberal mentality," and following the views of Dr. Thomas Szasz, he lambastes the inclusion of homosexuality in the mythical category of "mental illness." Insofar as Dr. Szasz is right, Professor Brudnoy is also right. I myself know next to nothing about psychology and won't presume to evaluate the arguments. What I will do is note how this sudden turn complements Professor Brudnoy's earlier tactics. The *only* "case for heterosexuality" that he either refutes or states accurately is that of a group with whom his readers are probably predisposed to disagree. In the conservative and libertarian hierarchies of villains, liberal psychiatrists rank near the apex, an infamy well-earned by such incidents as the *Fact* magazine poll referred to by Professor Brudnoy, in which 1189 psychiatrists were willing to brand Senator Barry Goldwater, sight unseen, as a psychopath; well-earned also by years of lobbying for a system of therapeutic incarceration that expands the power of both the state and the practitioners of psychiatry.

Only this unhonored group, it is suggested through omission and silence, presents a superficially rational basis for criticizing homosexuality. By refuting them, Professor Brudnoy can give the appearance of having more to say on behalf of homosexuality than *ad ho-*

*minem* assertions based on the character of its opponents. At the same time, he strengthens the recurring innuendo: antihomosexuals are birds of a feather with every manner of despicable being.

Thus does Professor Brudnoy fight prejudice with prejudice, bigotry with bigotry, injustice with injustice. One may legitimately ask: is fairness toward one group furthered by unfairness toward everybody else? Since Professor Brudnoy so studiously avoids his nominal subject, I don't know what he would say on behalf of the moral validi-

ty of homosexuality. He talks in passing of the character of homosexuals, how many "have risen high in science, government, the arts, live good lives, and so forth" and how "the homosexual population is by and large decent, even beneficial to America." At the same time, he concedes that the columns of a leading homosexual publication, the *Los Angeles Advocate*, "confirm much of what antihomosexual thinkers say."

Evidently arguments based on the character of homosexuals will get us little further than arguments based on

the character of antihomosexuals. On the positive side, as on the negative, Professor Brudnoy contributes nothing toward a better understanding of his topic. Let me then conclude with a few preliminary and tentative considerations of the sort that Professor Brudnoy should have raised, either to affirm or to confute.

It would be useful, to begin with, to know what science has not yet determined: to what extent is homosexuality an innate disposition resulting from heredity or from early environmental fac-

## Bentham, Burke, and QWERTY

*But no name, no power, no function, no artificial institution whatsoever can make the men of whom any system of authority is composed any other than God, and nature, and education, and their habits of life have made them. Capacities beyond these the people have not to give. . . . Old establishments are tried by their effects. If the people are happy, united, wealthy, and powerful, we presume the rest. We conclude that to be good from whence good is derived. In old establishments various correctives have been found for their aberrations from theory. Indeed, they are the results of various necessities and expediences. They are not often constructed after any theory; theories are rather drawn from them.*

Edmund Burke,  
Reflections on the  
Revolution in France (1790)

Had Edmund Burke lived long enough to see the spiritual sons of Enlightenment rationalism—yes, even the "reasonable" experimental rationalism chronicled by Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment*—he would hardly have been surprised. Building a universal ethical or juridical system on the basis of a philosophic calculus would have seemed like the ultimate in human folly to Burke: "The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*. Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science. . . ."

Robert Nisbet, throughout his writings, but especially in *Quest for Community*, points to this aspect of nineteenth-century conservative thought: the distrust of rational schemes of political or social reconstruction. In his *Social Change and History*, Nisbet reminds us that it is structure and permanence that provide the setting for change, and that the former categories, rather than the latter, are basic to human society. Men resist change.

I have nothing profound to add to this topic. But I did run across something quite striking recently. In a science issue of the now defunct *Saturday Review* (October, 1972), Charles Lekberg presented a peculiar bit of sociological data in an essay, "The Tyranny of Qwerty." Qwerty? Qwerty is that famous top row of letters that confronts us on typewriters, on-line computer outlets, teletype terminals, and tape- and card-punching machines. Qwerty is the primary system devised to get ideas onto the printed page. So long as Mr. McLuhan's age of hot messages stays in the future (and his book royalties keep rolling in), we will have to deal with qwerty. And qwerty, it now appears, is not very efficient.

I won't bother you with the details. Developed in 1872, the present typewriter keyboard remains firmly entrenched internationally. Yet Mr. August Dvorak, the originator of the Dvorak Simplified Keyboard (patent lapsed), concluded forty years ago that we could have a superior keyboard simply by arranging the keys at random. He devised a truly efficient keyboard, and during World War II, fourteen Navy women were retrained to use it. After one month the women were turning out 74 percent more work and were 68 percent more accurate. Lekberg writes: "Using the Dvorak simplified keyboard, or DSK, as it came to be called, the women's fingertips were moving little more than one mile on an average day, compared with twelve to twenty miles a day for typists using the standard keyboard." In 1965, the U.S. Bureau of Standards announced that "there is little need to demonstrate further the superiority of the Dvorak keyboard in experimental tests. Plenty of well-documented evidence exists."

So much for the data concerning efficiency. Yet it seems safe to conclude that not one person in ten thousand had ever heard of the Dvorak keyboard prior to Lekberg's essay. Certainly my local IBM typewriter sales department had never

heard of it, in spite of the fact that one IBM model—Model D—is available with a Dvorak keyboard for a \$15 surcharge. Most of the other typewriter companies offer it. They do not get calls for it, and they do not advertise it, so far as I have ever seen.

Here, then, is a classic Bentham-Burke conflict, although morality is not directly involved. Why are men so irrational as to ignore, for four decades, an utterly rational improvement? Why are intellectuals—those peculiar people who buy typewriters and hire secretaries who use them—as immune to reason as the unwashed masses? Habit. Good, old-fashioned, Burkean habit. It is costly to relearn things. It is costly to reform educational institutions that train young typists. It is costly to advertise, especially now that the patent has run out. In short, rational solutions are very expensive.

Those of us who are in the arm-chair-blueprint-for-social-reconstruction business should be made more humble by Mr. Dvorak's keyboard. I doubt that many of us will run out and buy one. (I may. In twenty years of typing papers, I've never learned to use more than one finger, so my costs of retraining are lower. But I probably won't.) Yet for the man who faces the typewriter keyboard daily, what could be more rational? Just a few simple changes in our habits, and we can have a far more efficient skill at our disposal. But qwerty will continue to tyrannize us, one and all, and our children and grandchildren, too. I doubt that even the Esperanto people would want to make the necessary changes. We are not that change-oriented, even for the sake of rationalism.

"Today Dvorak; tomorrow the world!" (Well, maybe I'll get to Dvorak tomorrow.)

Rational blueprints have been a glut on the market for a long time. We need them, but we should not overestimate them. They are very expensive to implement.

Gary North