An open letter to Rabbi Elias Lieberman

Sexual Behavior & the Law

Dear Elias,

Your "My View" in today's CAPE COD TIMES prompts me to this reply:

1 In your "Time to follow Vermont's lead on same-sex unions," your coign of vantage is, quite properly, that of a religious leader. In that role, you here link "the divine image" in humanity with what you consider a proper implication thereof, namely, that individuals are "worthy of respect." The same book, the first book of our Bible, yours and mine, speaks both of that "image" (1.26-27) and of treating murderers not with respect but with the extreme opposite of respect, namely, death (9.5-6). Your notion that everybody's worthy of respect--meaning respectful treatment--is unbiblical. Unless you would argue that execution is more respectful than incarceration.

2 On PBS television, against two Vermont laywers I argued that that state's supreme court and legislature should not yield to pressures for legalizing same-sex marriages/unions. I thank God Hawaii did not yield to those pressures, nor have any of the other 48 state governments. The popular rush to judgment against tradition sweeps up most liberal clergy, who are predisposed to favor the new against the old. Jesus (in Mt.13.52) predisposes Christians to favor neither old nor new.

3 To support the legalization of same-sex marriages/unions, you must set aside the Bible's specific condemnation of homosexual behavior. This you do thus: "The Bible's references to homosexual acts tell me more about those who shaped the Bible than they do about God's intentions for humanity." That hermeneutical (interpretive) principal can be used to press the "Delete" key on any affirmation in Scripture. Does not anything the Bible says about anything tell us more about those who wrote the Bible than it does about God? And if so, what becomes of the biblical doctrine of revelation, on which you Jews and we Christians depend for the telling of the Story of creation, fall, and redemption?

4 Though you say "I am not wedded to a literal reading of sacred scriptures," what you seem to mean is that into your "Not Literal" box goes every Bible item you happen not to like. What you do like you are serious about: the "image of God" is in large letters in your "Serious" box. We can all understand that--like everybody else--you're serious about some things in the Bible & not others. If the Bible is to have any authoritative value for you & those you try to lead, you should make clear what your sorting criterion is. It is, I think, humanistic values, which dominate your branch of Judaism.

5 One common characteristic of humanisms is disrespect for traditional taboos. Rightly, you say that some "faith traditions...cannot accomodate a view of homosexuality as anything other than abhorrent." In dissociating yourself from this feeling, you are in effect associating youself with the gay movement's denigration as "homophobes" (homo-fearers/haters) those who have that feeling. Yet ethics & law as well as education & religion need the revulsion factor.

6 Revulsion is a friend of freedom because it's an inner coercion reducing external coercion, i.e. ethical & legal sanctions. All 50 of the United States have laws against pedophilia because some adults whose sexual preference is for children are insufficiently revulsed by the thought of acting on their preference. All 50 states had anti-homosexual-behavior laws expressive & supportive of public revulsion: revulsion weakens without feeding, & education alone is insufficient. Pedophilia & homosexuality both being natural, why should revulsion against either be fed? But let's look at a legal taxonomy of all this, how it all looks from the coign of vantage of the legal profession (to supplement that of the clergy profession, from which you speak):

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Sexual Behavior & the Law:
WHAT THE LAW....

A
privileges : marriage Even the latest dictionaries limit this to heterosexuality. National Council of Churches exec. Robt.Edgar signed an ecumenical statement to that effect, then under gay pressure withdrew his name even though 35 of the 36 churches (mine, the UCC, being the exception) agree with the statement.

B
permits : fornication, adultery, sodomy Though all 50 states had laws against premarital intercourse, marital infidelity, & (as CDAE/00 puts it) "the sexual act of putting the penis into the anus or mouth of another person"), all three behaviors are now in most states deregulated.

C
prohibits : pedophilia All 50 states have laws against adult/child sexual behavior, though pressure is building (e.g., by the political activities of the National Association of Men and Boys) to deregulate.

7 The American spirit of freedom/liberty/liberation/deregulation/rights creates a great sucking sound upward from C to B & from B to A. By the semantic sleight of hand of substituting "union" for "marriage," Vermont has moved sodomy from B to A. The energy to privilege by deregulation proved stronger than the revulsion factor. The Web suggests the same may prove true in the case of pedophilia: "the changing response to child-adult sex." Parallelly, the incest taboo is weakening, though at least not yet the murder taboo.

You are so beguiled by the rhetoric of justice, equality, rights, & freedom of conscience as to seem unaware of the sociopolitical dynamics of taboo-revulsion, which traditionally the clergy of all religions have been responsible for protecting & promoting within a paradigmatic sense of the sacred. If you think that all these strictures are mere social constructions, in what sense do you qualify as a religous leader?

8 You quote approvingly & in extenso the recent declaration of the "Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry." The documents controlling value is the one to which liberals today attribute more sacrality than any other, viz. equality: "We oppose appeals to sacred texts and religious traditions for the purpose of denying legal equity to same-gender couples." Surely you cannot be unaware that the pedophile liberation movement uses the same argument for their cause, & equally despises Bible & sacred traditions. And like them you pollute the word "family" by prejudicial extension. And consider such slippery statements as these you quote: (1) "We affirm the right to freedom of conscience in this matter." A disingenuous statement when what is being sought is not freedom but privilege, viz. marital privileges. (3) "The State should not interfere with same-gender couples." The illogic of this is that by doing nothing, the State would be interfering! (3) The text speaks of "civil marriage," whereas Vermont granted only "union." (4) Can you really think that if the gay community does not win State marital privileges it is "dishonor"ing "the convictions" of those who officiate at "same-gender marriages"? Dishonoring by doing nothing at all? (5) "The State may not favor the convictions of one religious group over another...." Not a historical comment. E.g., antipolygamy laws on the books for more than a century. (6) Manufacturing rights & claiming them inherent: Individuals have a "fundamental right to marry and have those marriages recognized by civil law." People these days exercise the "right" to various sexual living arrangements (except any involving children), but is the government in any sense obligated to ratify the arrangements?

9 Appealing again to "the divine image," you conclude thus: "The denial of civil rights to any group is a rejection of that sacred teaching." Your pious protest does not, does it, include the pedophile community? And it's a queer logic to claim that the State's not legalizing same-sex marriage/union is "the imposition of a faith stance."