

SAME - SEX "MARRIAGE" ?

FURTHER* NOTES TOWARD THE 5.6.98 "CONFESSING CHRIST"

#2887

4.20.98

* In addition to #2863

THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION (SERIES ON "ISSUES TROUBLING THE CHURCH")

1 This Thinksheet is (as this 4.13.98 CAPE COD TIMES letter shows) for "the civil rights of homosexuals" & against (1) language abuse & (2) "in-your-face" gay activism (as both anti-natural & counter-productive). Yes, it's against the **semantic spread** of "normal" to include human beings who for single or multiple reasons (genetic, congenital, familial, societal, personal) are not exclusively heterosexual in "orientation."

The **semantic spread** this Thinksheet is objecting to is the extension of "marriage" to include same-sex sexual coupling to bring same within the "Marriage" § of the Codex Juris Civilis (ie, with all the rights & privileges the laws provide for [heterosexual] marriage).

2 We opponents of same-sex "marriage" are being slandered for the mean-spiritedness of wanting to exclude "them" from "our" club. As the accusation goes we are intolerant (in violation of what's at the moment the supreme civic virtue) & homophobic (in violation of one of the four classical virtues, viz. courage). Personally, I dissociate myself from both prejudice & cowardice--for good reason, as many members of the (gay-oriented) Metropolitan Community Churches can testify.

3 Intellectual defenders of homosexuality as "normal" adduce history (eg, classical Athens), anthropology (a few living tribes), & ethology (some animal-behavior). We reply that these evidences prove the opposite: in all such cases, homosexuality is marginal though acceptable. My position exactly: Because homosexuality is acceptable though marginal, no gay-bashing & no denial of human & civil rights except vis-a-vis a certain few occupations (which ones, not in the purview of this Thinksheet).

4 Moot is the question whether our species has a **natural revulsion** against homosexuality, corresponding to the taboos against incest & pederasty (both of which are on the increase as the taboos against them are dissolving in the acids of "love" & "tolerance"). Some argue that all three are, as social constructs, up for revisioning. I hold that while the three are given various shapes in various cultures, the material to be shaped is natural: ergo, any of the three behaviors is to that extent unnatural. And of course--also only to that extent--not normal (but not "abnormal," a word intended to throw folks into the hands of shrinks as "mental-health" cases).

5 Moot, too, is the question whether **spiritual revulsion** against homosexuality is an essential element of biblical religion (kernel or husk, in Fosdick's famous analogy). John Witte Jr. (law & ethics, Emory U.) provides a historical base for this & some other pertinent questions in his FROM SACRAMENT TO CONTRACT: Marriage, Religion, & Law in the Western Tradition (Westminster/JK/97). Let's have a look:

It's logical that marriage, if a sacrament, should begin with sacramental blessing before the altar of God. (Here I'm applying his text to this Thinksheet's subject.) Some clergy (UCC, an Episcopalian, a Presbyterian, & a Methodist--so far as I've heard) have so treated same-sex "marriage." This Witte calls the Catholic position on marriage (but certainly not on same-sex "marriage!").

Give gays rights; don't call them 'normal'

Regarding homosexuality, the public is for "out-of-the-closet" and against "in-your-face." The New York Times' editorial you published March 14 is for "accepting homosexuals as normal."

Two difficulties here, one linguistic and the other cultural.

The linguistic difficulty is that this use of normal was itself abnormal. We can all understand why homosexuals fight the dictionaries on this -- understand, sympathize, but please not agree. I'm against calling them queers, but also against queer use of language, the abuse of words.

If we let Humpty Dumpty win with his claim that "words mean what I want them to mean," how are we to communicate? Language abuse is people abuse.

The cultural difficulty is that religion is wrongly identified as the hurdle homosexuals must

clear in order for the general society to accept them as normal. As one Manhattan gay put it to me recently, "If we could just get rid of religion...."

Not so fast! Nazism and Stalinism were both anti-gay and anti-religious.

Wrongly, that piece from that other Times says "Those old definitions (of homosexuals as sinful, criminal, mentally flawed) all grew from religious teaching." The truth is that they didn't "grow" from anything. They exist in cultures, not just religions, though religion of some kind is the taproot of culture.

For a half century I've been for the civil rights of homosexuals. But the over-claim that they are "normal" defies linguistic and profoundly complex cultural realities and cannot be sustained.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville

Without abandoning the sacramental base, the Lutherans saw marriage as social estate & the Calvinists as covenant; the Anglicans used the commonwealth model. Then the Enlightenment peeled off the sanctity & politics, reducing marriage to a legal action (a contract) between a man & a woman, with rights of privacy & property.

6 The logic of the Enlightenment legal-contract model is that marriage should be performed by an officer of the law (the state), not of the church. When in 1937 I achieved clergy status to marry (under N.Y.State law), my father (who as legal functionary married over 2,000 couples in his time) jestingly complained that I might be horning in on his business. I returned the jest: If any couple coming to him for marriage had in mind something more than (Enlightenment) contract, they should come under *my* authority-office-function. Let the states decide whether to perform same-sex "marriage" (& whether to call them such, which I hope not, as historically "marriage" is redolent of so much more than mere contract, & spreading the word to include mere contract would further impoverish it of its richer connotations).

7 Consider now the **confusion & impoverishment** when, taken in by contract-model-argumentation, clergy "marry" gays before the altar of God, sacralizing behavior that is (in the Mind of the Church) against both nature & Scripture. Confusion, impoverishment, & also **pollution & enervation**. In our liberal Protestant churches, the laity have, on many social issues, moved from rigor to latitudinarianism (thence, many, to indifference); but they are revolting, with the double revulsion of nature & Scripture, against sacralizing (in their churches!) gay "marriage." The cost of pushing same in our churches is a cost of folly, not one part of the cost of discipleship. On this issue, the UCC is losing not just members but also churches. (The ordaining of practicing homosexuals is another current UCC stupidity.)

8 Many battles are won/lost at the first line of defense. On this Thinksheet's issue, that first line is the word "normal" (the power-parallel word being "equal"): all is lost if "normal" is granted. Another instance: Christianity's pronouns for God are our first line of defense against a Feuerbachian redesigning of the deity: stop referring to God as "he" & the floodgates are open to goddess religion & New Age gnosticisms (including the depersonalizing of God into "Energy" et al).

9 This Thinksheet's first two lines came to mind as we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (I went to S.F. to speak on the occasion of the 20th, & it's the 50th already!). In the current permissivistic Zeitgeist of semantic spreads, think about what's happened to "family." I believe that the family's "protection by society & the State" should include holding the line against the dilution of the word "family" (a dilution made worse by same-sex "marriage"). Witte, p278: "Marriage and the family are indispensable to the integrity of the individual and the preservation of the social order." On the devastation wrought by the reduction of marriage/family to legal contract, Witte (pp196ff) speaks of "a new theology of deism, individualism, & rationalism" in Locke's logic: "the essence of marriage was the voluntary bargain struck between the two parties"--that, & nothing more.

10 Scientific postmodernism claims that "unnatural" is on-surface a political & at-bottom a religious word that should not impede the progress of science. Lawrence Tribe was against human cloning, the ultimate in narcissism (I making another Me without you), but has changed his mind (p1, PROPOSITIONS [Inst. for Am. Values, Spr./98]): we mustn't downput "unconventional ways of linking erotic attachment, romantic commitment, genetic replication, gestational mothering, and the joys and responsibilities of child rearing." We individuals are (Jn. Rawls) "self-originating sources of valid claims," self-creatures, writing our own teleology as each painter paints on a separate canvas. The sentimental religious response to this hyperindividualism is I-feel-your-pain hypertrophied compassion, with Rousseau at the beginning of the foodchain. It easily justifies radical revisionism such as emasculating the biblical deity (as in THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, soon to be a curiosum).

11 In processing bookcatalogs for the New York Theological Seminary library, lately I've noticed a steep increase in pro-gay literature (true also in periodicals). That's

the way the tide's been flowing, & it's hard to swim against the tide (as I must). Now we have a pro-gay magazine published by gay-affirming groups in the United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Baptist Churches, & United Church of Christ. (Here's the Spr. /97 cover--an issue full of arguments & models for church blessings of same-sex unions.) "Don't ask, don't tell" isn't working in the military, & "You needn't ask, I'll tell" won't work in the churches despite the current gay ecclesial activism. What is working is an increasing alienation of the pew from the gay-promoting pulpit.

12 The spectrum on gays-&-the-church issues runs all the way from draw-no-line "open & affirming" (of gay membership, same-sex altar-unions, ordination of practicing gays) to draw-the-line exclusion of homosexuals from church membership. In between are many lines to choose. I draw the line against practicing homosexual pastors & against same-sex altar-unions.

At NYTSeminary $\frac{1}{4}$ c. ago, I faced a parallel line-drawing problem (spelled out in #816, #822, & #892 ["Homosexuality #3: A biblical-theological reflection on homosexuality"]). I favored having gay students, spoke to groups of gay prospects, & wrote the intro to a book titled HOMOPHOBIA. And as a dean, I supported individual gay students taking tutorials/courses/seminars/degrees &, in groups, working with a particular straight teacher (as I was doing)--but drew the line against "groups of students working with a gay teacher with full NYTS recognition," a "gay on the Administrative Faculty" (though I was for having "a gay teacher, or gay teachers, among Adjunct Faculty"), "a nondegree program for gays," & "a degree program for gays." (One summer, I hired two gays to work in the library on condition that they agree not to solicit on the job. I had to let them go: they came on to two co-workers, my sons!)



13 The early Christians taught that any sexual behavior other than faithful monogamy **dishonors** marriage (eg, 1Thes.4.3-7, 1Cor.5.1-23, Eph.5.3-5, Heb.13.4). All coercive & consensual sexual intercourse outside of (heterosexual) marriage is consistently & vigorously condemned, as was divorce (both as rupturing of a for-life relationship & as dishonoring marriage). Among all three ethnic strands (Jewish, Greek, Roman) of early Christianity, what is "honorable" is closely associated with what is "sacred": dishonor is blasphemous, & impiety is dishonorable. One could hardly imagine any action more offensive to this founding Christian ethical mentality than same-sex altar-unions. The pew vaguely, inarticulately senses the double offense. I can voice it, & am morally & theologically obligated to do so.

14 Same-sex altar-unions are just one more evidence of the **intellectual-ethical flacidity** of trendy Protestantism today. In a syndicated column on another issue two weeks ago, eminent Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner taunted us for it. And in the Yale area two days ago, a brilliant professor who grew up Congregational, upon returning to his home church after a somewhat lengthy absence, found it believing not the gospel (as he remembered it being preached there) but "Emerson"--so he left, joining a denomination that takes Christian theological & ethical doctrine seriously (as he put it to Loree & me)....I'd put it this way: In liberal Protestant churches, Christian theological & ethical doctrine has been commandeered in the service of various liberationisms corresponding with various categories of "oppressed," who can rip off the churches' attention & energies by playing the victim card. Clever victims, in calling attention to their "oppression," include in their pain-bags a pain they've no right to, the pain Eugene Kennedy in a just-published book well calls THE PAIN OF BEING HUMAN. What's called for now is some tough, honest, honorable Christian intellection recovering the gospel & exposing the exploiting "victims" & their co-dependents. The church needs liberation from feminist, gay, & other liberationists!

15 Homo-hermeneutics neutralizes the Bible by claiming that it has nothing to say about sexual orientation, only about sexual behavior--thus freeing the alleged homo-oriented to same-sex unions. But that dog won't hunt: The biblical *action*-options are celibacy/marriage for **everybody**. Somebody has a sexual "preference" for (orientation toward?) children: tough luck. Or toward adults of one's own sex: tough luck. Don't make too much of sex in or out of marriage: learn to love (which is possible, as commanded). Love isn't easy in marriage no matter your "orientation." The male is the "chaos gender," with "anarchic" sexual desires after the Fall (Jon. Mills, LOVE, COVENANT & MEANING [Regent College Pub./98]): it may be no harder for a gay to be faithful to a woman than it is for a straight. "Most men have the capacity for sexual relations with both men and women," & neither research nor common sense suggests "that 'homosexual' men lack what is necessary to choose to be good husbands and to raise their families well." And pronounced heterosexualness in a man "is much more likely to dissolve his marriage than to bind him to his wife." Nor can one escape by saying gays married to women are unhappy: how many straights also are! Marriage is more of the will than of the glands; it's for love & kids more than for sexual "fulfilment." (Clinton has an appetite for women & eros for his wife. Since apparently he's always taken no for an answer, he's never been guilty [says Gloria Steinem] of sexual harassment.)....Thus Mills scorns all this rationalizing talk about "orientation" & this gay pollution of the word "marriage." His subtitle is revealing: "Why are Liberals and Conservatives Conspiring to Prevent 'Homosexual' Men from Marrying?"....As for the bio-props under "orientation," the jury is still out, as a recent U. of Chicago book exhibits....Whatever you think of Mills' "orientation" to this Thinksheet's subject, will you not agree that he deserves a place at the debate-table?

16 Faithful marriage for life is unnatural & famously fails to satisfy all sexual "needs," though it usually meets some sexual desires. Its unnaturalness means it's revealed, or a social construct, or both. Once you've accepted its unnaturalness, you're relatively free from the cloying call of nature, & free for the most human uses of nature. Thus have I taught Christian marriage for the more than 60 years that I've been church-&-state authorized to perform weddings. In a Christian marriage, the spouses aim more at pleasing God than at pleasing each other: pleasing each other is thus relativized & thus freed from idolatry & the IFD disease (romantic decline from excessive idealism to frustration to despair-divorce). I should be teaching something else, something different, about marriage? Honor thy feelings, yes, & thy neighbor's; but honor also the truth that self-discipline is the systematic violation of one's feelings in the interest of a higher order.

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
Craigville MA 02632

