

marriage

After worship tomorrow, our pastor will lead a congregational discussion of two "marriage" resolutions which will be voted on at the upcoming UCC Mass. annual conference --for education toward arrival at "the mind of the church" on the issue, & for the guidance of our two representatives. Here is one response to the resolutions:

And here's the nub of the resolutions: **Blue IV: Resolution in support of all marriages.**

Its phrase "all marriages" fails to address the issue, which is the propriety of importing gay unions into the historically heterosexual wd. "marriage"----a

Loree & I were among the signatories of this 5.21.04 declaration.

We pastors and leaders in United Church of Christ congregations in Massachusetts lament the divisive current preoccupation with issues of sexuality while more pressing claims of mission and witness go unattended.

We do affirm the teaching of Jesus Christ that the standard for sexuality is the "one flesh" union of a man and a woman in marriage (Matt. 19:4-6, Mk. 10:6-8, [Gen. 2:26]), and reject any efforts to associate Christ, "the sole Head" of the Church (Preamble, UCC Constitution), with public policy counter to this norm. Given our congregational polity and our much-touted diversity, we call upon the Church to respect differences on this disputed question and encourage dialog, rather than making one political viewpoint the litmus test of Christian faithfulness.

move long promoted by the gay lobby to achieve not only "gay rights" (which gays have in Vermont without "marriage") but the equality of social dignity of homosexual with heterosexual committed unions. **Blue V: Resolution to support the Mass. Supreme Judicial Court's decision affirming the rights of gay and lesbian couples to marry.** Here we have, as we had in Blue IV, the imperialistic blurring of church & state by imposition of the ethos of the former upon the latter (as in the Ro.Church present efforts--even to the eucharistic disciplining of candidates for public office!) to impose anti-abortion on America. E.g., this wording: "Everyone is welcome at the table Jesus sets" (to make the statement true, add "who submits to Jesus" after the word "Everyone"). Before 1833, our "church of the Mayflower" could talk as though its language applied virtually to all Mass. residents--but in 2004? Note the blurring also in the phrases "all God's beloved" & "all God's people."

As a Biblical scholar, I must remark the special pleading of both resolutions' cateferia-style exegesis--appealing to the double (God/neighbor) love-commandment to preach inclusivity, yet passing up the Bible's accent on exclusivity (e.g., OT "not my people" [Heb., "lo ami": Hos.1.10; 2.23; qtd. in Ro.9.25 & 26 & in 1P.2.10]; NT, Jn.1.12 [those who don't "receive" Jesus don't "become children of God"]). Bible abuse is bad enough; worse, for Christian conversation, is the smug arrogance of these "inclusivists" who think that in this logomachy (this "word-fight" over the word "marriage") they, unlike their opponents, have Jesus & the gospel on their side.

Our UCC Reformed tradition rightly distinguishes between **common** grace (in which all human beings are creationally divine offspring) & **special** grace (in which, by "election," only faithful Christians are God's children). Sentimental liberal theologians blur the distinction (compare the Queen of Hearts: "All have won and all shall have prizes.") The Cross disappears, & Resurrection power along with it.

Now, in no special order, for private meditation & group discussion, is a Q&A:

+++

1 Are women equal to men? Not those who may become pregnant. Righty, laws discriminate in their favor, because they are more than equal, & it would be unfair to them to treat them as equals. "Equality" is a mathematical, impersonal, secular idea: the Bible is, rather, concerned with equity.

2 Are homosexuals equal to heterosexuals. Biologically, no: they've not completed their psychosexual development (because of nature? nurture? both?). But yes as individuals "before" (i.e., facing) the law. And yes vis-a-vis all human relationships

(personal, economic, cultural, political).

3 Are "human rights" & "equal rights" the same? They overlap but are not the same, though egalitarianism (the utopian philosophy that all humans are "created equal" in more than the political sense Jefferson intended) equates them. The native S. African (& chief justice) who cast the deciding "gay marriage" vote (Mass. Sup. Ct., Goodridge Decision, 11/03) demonstrated to free Mandela, & she sees no apples/oranges problem in extending from race to sexual preference (both being, according to her questionable understanding, bio-givens). Those who (including me) see the nature/nurture jury on "sexual preference" still out, claim that the Court's majority view was grounded on a category error, & the Legislature should not deprive the people of the right to vote on the issue.

4 Are "civil marriage" & "marriage" the same? No! The former is "state" (& my father married thousands), the latter is "church" (& when, in 1937, I was licensed by church & state* to marry, he jocularly requested that I not "horn in on" his "business" [though he always "prayed 'em good"]]. * New York State.

5 Is "civil marriage" inclusive of "gay marriage"? No; "civil marriage" & "civil union" are synonymous; but "gay marriage" (synonymous with "straight marriage") is the "marriage" (by semantic expansion [I say, dilution/pollution]) of homosexuals. Both before & after being on a PBS panel with them, I argued to the two VT lawyers (who were to present the issue to the VT legislature) that they had a better chance of meeting their objective (viz., equal rights for gay unions) if they were to drop the word "marriage"--which they did, & won.

6 Don't MA gays want the same union-rights that VT gays have had for two years? No; they want those + the right to the dignity of the word "marriage." Cognizant of the changed legal ploy in VT, the gay lobby bypassed the MA legislature on the hunch (which proved happy) that they could achieve this objective by presenting their case to the MA Supreme Judicial Court.

6 Is there any evidence that letting gay couples join the "marriage" club damages "marriage"? Yes. For one thing, it's a violation of church & state by state (i.e., governmental) invasion of church (i.e., in the broad sense, common society beyond state-control). To those unfamiliar with the tight culture/language lock, governmental cooptation, by legal semantic expansion, of a public-domain word is a dangerous encroaching of government (which should be BY the people) ON the people. And for another thing, it weakens the traditional governmental privileging of society's citizen-producing institution. (On the latter, scholars of the family--e.g., U. Chicago's Don Browning--are defenders of the traditional meaning of the word "marriage.")

7 Shouldn't Christians be for equal "liberty and justice for all," including homosexuals? On the model of Moynahan's "defining deviance down," this question defines justice down to equality, which (in the Solomon trial) would have meant $\frac{1}{2}$ baby to each woman--the tyranny of evenhandedness. The American citizenry, poorly trained in religion & philosophy, is an easy victim of secular conners (the ACLU, e.g.) who reduce all issues to individual/interpersonal thin "rights."

8 Why not remove the word "marriage" from the lawbooks, government's role then being only to record ("license") sexual unions? Sounds simple, & it is (even simple-minded, given the societal-legal complexities of aim/crime/punishment/restitution). In the 6.04 UNITED CHURCH NEWS, an ordained shrink "and marriage and family therapist" proposes this simplism: the state should be "out of the marriage business entirely." And here we go again: "All of us are the sons and daughters of God. Let people be who they are." Then, compliant with atmospheric individualism, he relocates the sacred: "It is never the institution of marriage that is sacred. What is sacred is the two individuals [sic] and the love they bring." Then this half-truth: "Marriage is always changing" (the other half: it's never changed from heterosexual).

9 If "God is love," how can anyone believe that he loves heteros more than homos? Our calculus of quantity is inapplicable to the divine love. But the divine will is relevant, & it's biblically displayed as "basar ehad" (heterosexual "one flesh," on which see the declaration [above]). The telic norms (hetero-orientations into procreative "marriage") do not condemn non-normality as ab-normal.

John Barber, Philip Bauman, David Buchanan II, Susan Butler, Martha
Cohen, Jack Daniel, Herb Davis, Earl Eisenbach, Loree G. Elliott, Willis
Elliott, Dorothy Fackre, Gabriel Fackre, David Fehser, Richard L. Floyd,
Virginia Gray, Gary Greene, Miles Hall, Roger Lier, Howard MacMullen,
Brian Miller, Richard Olmsted, Dale Proulx, Paul Sangree, Steven Small,
Max Stackhouse, William Tucker, Phil Winders, Timothy Ziegenhals

- 5.21.04