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Sexual behavior, religion and the law

CAPE COD TIMES
3.5.01

By REV. WILLIS ELLIOTT

This is in response to a recent "My View" column by Rabbi Elias Lieberman, supporting civil unions of gay couples.

On PBS television, against two Vermont lawyers, I argued that that state should not yield to pressures pushing for legalizing same-sex marriages/unions. Whether or not I won the debate, those lawyers won their case. They convinced the legislature, and Vermont is now the only state in which the sexual preference of adults is not a factor in "marital" rights.

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To accord homosexuality the same legal status as marriage breaks a social contract of universal force.

Do you think the law should stay out of sex? Never has, never can. People differ only on where and how the law should get into sex.

A few small religious groups are in favor of granting same-sex couples the same legal status as married couples. This loosening is a grave error and abandonment of religion's responsibility to strengthen the basic structures of society.

But why do some religious leaders favor the loosening? Let's look at the recent declaration of the "Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry." It's controlling value is *equality*, the golden calf of liberal politics and religion. Accorded sacred status, this value trumps Scripture, which it explicitly sets aside in the interest of granting "legal equity to same-gender couples."

REV. WILLIS ELLIOTT

> The Vermont Legislature's legalization of same-sex unions moves from permission to promotion, utterly destroying the taboo.

Further, the document is driven by a religious devotion to America's rampant individualism, which manufactures rights and then claims them to be inherent.

Individuals, it says, have a "fundamental right to marry and have those marriages recognized by civil law."

"Marry?" People these days exercise the "right" to various sexual living arrangements, but is the government in any way obligated to ratify these arrangements?

Through laws, society addresses sexual behavior, not sexual preference.

But now the Vermont Legislature, in defiance of America's central religious and ethical heritage, has validated gay rhetoric's "natural" claim.

The Bible – and therefore historic Judaism and Christianity – solidly sees homosexual behavior as "unnatural" (for example, Romans 1:26-27).

Human beings are marvelous mixes of passions, intelligence and mystery. We need love and restraint with a sense of the sacred to promote and guard both. As specifically assigned to the sacred, clergy of all religions are to be teachers, guides and guardians of the particular society's values and virtues.

In a stable society, the taboos and the laws match. In a permissive society, laws erode taboos. In a disintegrating society, laws destroy taboos. The Vermont Legislature's legalization of same-sex unions moves from permission to promotion, utterly destroying the taboo.

In the big picture of society's ethical and legal sanctions, this use of the "delete" key comes at too high a cost.

The grim fact is that in America today, all the taboos are losing energy, the energy of public revulsion. The Web is talking about "the changing response to child-adult sex," which should be (the argument goes) no more repulsive to us than it was to the ancient Greeks. Taboos are learned behavior, and they can be unlearned and even reversed.

As there is no excuse for abusing homosexuals, there should be no excuse for the gay rhetoric abusing the opposition by calling us "homophobes," which means homo-fearers and homo-haters. I resent the insult.

Even more, I resent the abuse of the Bible by clergy promoters of "equal rights" for homosexuals. Here are some ploys used to bypass the plain fact that to the Bible, homosexuality is abhorrent:

1. "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 point of view can be used to press the "delete" button on anything you dislike in the Bible.

2. "I am not wedded to a literal reading of sacred scriptures." This frees the reader to trivialize the Bible by considering anything objectionable as nonliteral, therefore non-serious.

3. "The denial of civil rights to any group is a rejection of the sacred teaching" that "the divine image" is in every human being. You can't play chess with checkers, but you can take either a checker or a chess piece off its board to play some other game of your own devising.

Here, the biblical phrase "image of God" is torn out of its biblical contexts to play the game of humanism, whose values are the screening criteria for dealing with, and so abusing, the Bible.

We cannot be honest to God if we are dishonest to the Bible. But we can move beyond insult to mutual respect for the facts and for one another.

The Rev. Willis Elliott of Craigville is a retired minister of the United Church of Christ.

While I can recognize as mine this severely butchered, even somewhat rewritten, article--26 changes!--I must makes some comments: (1) The editor added the 1st ¶. (2) All seven §-headings were dropped, mushing everything together. (3) The main teaching section was dropped (here it is, printed from my computer):

> Do you think the law should stay out of sex? Never has, never can. People and societies differ only on where and how the law should get into sex. Until Vermont, this was the United States picture of the privileging, permitting, and prohibiting of sexual behavior:
>
> Pedophilia
>
> All fifty states have laws **prohibiting** adult-child sexual behavior, though pressure is building--for example, by
> the National Association of Men and Boys--to legalize pedophilia.
>
> Fornication, Adultery, Same-gender Sex
>
> All three behaviors--premarital sex, extramarital sex, same-gender sex--are now in most states **permitted**.
>
> Marriage
>
> Even the latest dictionaries limit this to the heterosexual, man-woman contract or covenant, which is legally **privileged**
> --and in this sense promoted--in all states except Vermont.

(4) My carefully crafted definitions & transitions have been blurred. (5) Major sentence-distortions: (a) The sentence beginning "To accord" should read "To accord same-sex unions....a social contract which was of universal force"; (b) The sentence beginning "Even more" should read "Even more, I resent the abuse of the Bible by clergy promoters of same-sex unions' access to legal marital rights." (6) Not being familiar with the nuances of the debate, the editor dropped a number of qualifiers essential for my debate-location....Newspapers being the blunt instruments they are, I can't complain. But I do!

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(3)

Willis Elliott

From: "Willis Elliott" <wandlelliott@mediaone.net>
To: "Bill Mills" <wmills@capecodonline.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2001 12:16 PM
Subject: As you requested, here is the e-mail. Please dispose of the fax, which I've revised.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR, RELIGION, AND THE LAW

On PBS television, against two Vermont lawyers I argued that that state should not yield to pressures pushing for legalizing same-sex marriages/unions. Whether or not I won the debate, those lawyers won their case. They convinced the legislature, and Vermont is now the only state in which same-sex couples have "marital" rights.

How radical is that change? In all of human history I know of no other instance of the legal de-privileging of "marriage" (always and everywhere, until very recently, defined as heterosexual). Since the "family" (always and everywhere, until very recently, defined as father-mother-child) is society's basic unit, all societies promote and defend marriage over against all other sexual arrangements--with, now, the exception of Vermont. To accord same-sex unions the same legal status as marriage (whether or not the unions are called "marriages") breaks a social contract which was of universal force until the present moral breakdown in a few socalled liberal democracies.

Do you think the law should stay out of sex? Never has, never can. People and societies differ only on where and how the law should get into sex. Until Vermont, this was the United States picture of the privileging, permitting, and prohibiting of sexual behavior:

Pedophilia

All fifty states have laws **prohibiting** adult-child sexual behavior, though pressure is building--for example, by
the National Association of Men and Boys--to legalize pedophilia.

Fornication, Adultery, Same-gender Sex

All three behaviors--premarital sex, extramarital sex, same-gender sex--are now in most states **permitted**.

Marriage

Even the latest dictionaries limit this to the heterosexual, man-woman contract or covenant, which is legally **privileged**
--and in this sense promoted--in all states except Vermont. A few small religious groups have officially come out for de-
privileging marriage by granting same-sex couples the same legal status as married couples. This loosening is, I believe, a grave error and abvandonment of religion's responsibility to strengthen the basic structures of society.

But why do some religious leaders favor the loosening? Let's look at the recent declaration of the "Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry." It's controlling value is equality, the golden calf of liberal politics and religion. Accorded sacred status, this value trumps sacred

literature, specifically the Bible, which it explicitly sets aside in the interest of granting "legal equity to same-gender couples."

I agree that "the state should not interfere with same-gender couples": same-gender sex should be pemitted. The illogic at this point in the declaration is the notion that by doing nothing, tlhe state would be interfering. Another illogic: the declaration claims that by doing nothing at all, the state would be "dishonoring the convictions" of those who officiate at "same-gender marriages."

Further, the document is driven by a quasi-religious devotion to America's rampant individualism, which in the past thirty years has manufactured rights and then claimed them to be inherent and unalienable. Individuals, it says, have a "fundamental right to marry and have those marriages recognized by civil law." "Marry"? People these days exercise the "right" to various sexual living arrangements, but is state or federal government in any way obligated to ratify these arrangements?

Behavior, not Preference

Through laws, society addresses sexual behavior, not sexual preference. The jury is still out as to whether homosexuality and pedophilia are "natural," but the verdict is in on the latter: adults who are sexually oriented toward children had better not behave naturally! And when gays and lesbians say they are behaving naturally, the alleged naturalness, whatever its weight in the court of public opinion, should have no weight in courts of law.

But now the Vermont legislature, in defiance of America's central religious and ethical heritage, has validated gay rhetoric's "natural" claim. The Bible--and therefore historic Judaism and Christianity--solidly sees homosexual behavior as "unnatural" (for example, Romans 1:26-27), against God's will, and repulsive. The contradiction is a flat reversal.

Repulsive Behavior and Religion

(5)

Willis Elliott

From: "Willis Elliott" <wandlelliott@mediaone.net>
To: "Bill Mills" <wmills@capecodonline.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2001 2:14 PM
Subject: Continuation

As there is no excuse for abusing homosexuals, there should be no excuse for the gay rhetoric abusing the opposition by calling us "homophobes," which means homo-fearers and homo-haters. I neither fear nor hate homosexuals, and I resent the insult--as homosexuals have every right to resent insults directed at them. Plain, oldfashioned mutual civility should not be too much to expect from both sides of this perplexing and anguished divide. And divide it is and so will remain despite present public-school efforts to break it down.

Bible Abuse

But even more, I resent the abuse of the Bible by clergy promoters of same-sex unions' access to legal marital rights. Here are some of the ploys these clever clergy use to bypass the plain fact that to the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, homosexual behavior is abhorrent, repugnant, repulsive. The quotations are from a recent column in the CAPE COD TIMES: by Rabbi Elias Lieberman

1 "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 point of view can be used to press the "Delete" button on anything you happen to dislike in the Bible.

2 "I am not wedded to a literal reading of sacred scriptures." This frees the reader to trivialize the Bible by considering non-literal--and therefore non-serious--anything the reader considers objectionable.

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5.28.12
Later, I conceded to the legalization of "gay unions" — on the basis of scientific proof that at least some homosexuality is "natural" ("born that way").
— W Elliott

Willis Elliott

From: "Willis Elliott" <wandlelliott@mediaone.net>
To: "Bill Mills" <wmills@capecodonline.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 27, 2001 1:17 PM
Subject: Sorry! Here's the continuation of "Sexual Behavior, Religion, and the

We human beings are marvelous mixes of passions, intelligence, and mystery. We need love and restraint, with a sense of the sacred to promote and guard both. As societally assigned to the sacred, clergy of all religions are to be teachers, guides, and guardians of each particular society's values and virtues--helping people feel attracted to the good and repelled by the evil.

These repulsions must be learned and fed. Almost all societies have taboos against murder, incest, rape, pedophilia, and homosexuality. Without the restraining force of taboo, societies would--and do--fall into lawlessness and "senseless" violence. And when repulsions grow weak in the soul, repression grows strong in society: we control ourselves inwardly, or "they" take over the control job.

Careful on that "Delete" Key!

In a stable society, the taboos and the laws match. In a permissive society, laws erode taboos. The Vermont legislature's legalization of same-sex unions moves from permission to promotion, destroying the taboo against homosexuality. In the big picture of society's ethical and legal sanctions, this particular use of the "Delete" key comes, I believe, at too high a cost.

The grim fact is that in America today, all the taboos are losing energy, the energy of public revulsion. The Net is discussing "the changing response to child-adult sex," which should be (the argument goes) no more repulsive to us than it was to some ancient Greeks and Romans. Taboos are learned behavior, and they can be unlearned and even reversed.

The "Homophobia" Insult

7

Willis Elliott

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Subject: Computer trouble! Sorry this must be another continuation.

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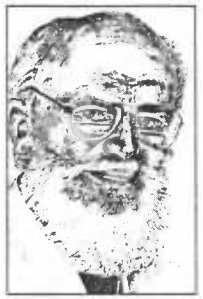

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