

SHOULD CHURCH ASSEMBLIES ENCOURAGE CONGREGATIONS TO HIRE HOMO- AND BI-SEXUALS AS PASTORS? ----- ELLIOTT #1930

My two involvements vis-a-vis this question are (1) being a consultant on such questions to a national taskforce of my communion, which in Synod and in my Conference (MA) has answered "yes"; and (2) the decision, in the penultimate session of a course ("Sexuality and the Christian Faith") I've been leading in the congregation of which I'm a member, that participants present written statements at the final session this Sunday (17Feb85). My position is a qualified "no." This thinksheet spells out the qualification and argues for my answer... NOTE: The UCC wording, national and state, is broader than that of this thinksheet's title: all ecclesial institutions are encouraged to hire homo- and bi-sexuals in all jobs, not just pastoring. For our congregation, the question has been sharpened down to pastoring: Should Synod and Conference encourage the Center-ville MA UCC congregation to?

WHO? Here's the breakdown: The question is not about (1) Closet (unpublic) homos and bis, which churches have always had as pastors--what they didn't know not hurting them: no ^{known} interpersonal genital activity, no problem in hiring. Here the genetic question (nature/nurture issue, generally and in each case) is irrelevant: behavior, not sexual preference, is all that's in view; nor is the homo-/bi-difference pertinent....(2) Caught homos and bis (a) who stonewall it, like Gerry Studds, or (b) who declare to "go and sin no more" (i.e., consider themselves sinners and repent, resolving to forego further homo- or bi-sexual genital activity), or (c) who, unlike Studds, not having violated any trust, use the occasion to declare themselves active or open-to-active....(3) Come-out-of-the-closet, declared homos and bis. This subcategory breaks down into (a) declared homos and (b) declared bis. It breaks down further into (a) declared homos/bis who take the initiative in declaring, and (b) declared homos/bis who, when questioned, do not deny. And a final breakdown: (a) Those who declare themselves active, (b) those who declare themselves open to action if "the right" sexual partner/s appear, and (c) those who declare themselves passive, i.e., continent (but with a heterosexual partner) or celibate (intending no sexual partner)....(4) Homos....(5) Bis.

WHY? There's an issue or issues here because (1) Bible and tradition are anti-homo (and thus, implicitly, anti-bi), and (2) sexual formation (=one's self-conscious sexual identity) is a psychosocial product, clear sexual differentiating (by attitudes and sexual role-assignments) being universal among humans. Religion always and everywhere having some responsibility for consciousness-formation (spiritual formation, etc.), religious leaders ought not to model confusion in any dimension (devotional, intellectual, sexual, or other)...so homos and bis--except when continent or celibate--should not pastor.

RIGHTS? I'm for homo-and-bi civil and economic rights--the latter, with the exception of pastoring. I'm proud of our UCC's long history of fighting for the rights of all, the liberation of the oppressed and wrongly discriminated against. But I'm against ideological liberationistic nondiscrimination: E.g., I think bisexuals, active or open-to-active, would be crosseyed models as pastors--ordained to preach the two monos (monotheism, only 1 God; monogamy, only 1 sexual partner), yet hypocritically non-mono in sexual behavior. It's silly and tragic when church assemblies declare against discriminating against bis in ecclesial jobs, at least in pastoring. The gospel of nondiscrimination and the gospel of Jesus Christ are different gospels.

MEMBERSHIP? In our church polity, each congregation decides eligibility for membership, both in joining and remaining a member. My position is that active or open-to-active homos who vow sexual faithfulness (i.e., only one sexual partner) should be welcomed into church membership. Bis, no, because they cannot vow faithfulness to only one sexual partner....Of course a congregation is autonomous, and may if it chooses employ as pastor anyone it chooses.