

Gay Unions, YES; Gay Marriage, NO

"Is there a religious and/or scriptural case for gay marriage?"

1.....In her eagerness to promote gay MARRIAGE (in her December 15 "Newsweek" cover story), journalist Lisa Miller converts herself from reporter to advocate, with no recognition of the compromise position, namely, gay UNION.

2.....The compromise position is not theoretical. Since July 1, 2000, it has been law in the State of Vermont. Earlier that year, in a PBS television debate with two pro-"marriage" Vermont lawyers, I had proposed the compromise as a way of honoring both the heterosexual meaning of "marriage" (in all major languages, and possibly all minor) and the need for legal recognition of the consensual rights of committed homosexual couples. After the debate, the two lawyers admitted to me that the compromise had a better chance of passing. And pass it did. Win-win should be, and usually is, more persuasive than win-lose.

3.....Gay "marriage," unlike gay "union," fails the Declaration of Independence test of "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind." The signers, aware that their signatures would spark a war, made a moral appeal to "mankind" that their signing, in light of their intention of liberty, did not disregard, but rather respected, the human inclination for freedom. The semantic expansion of "marriage" to include homosexual unions is disrespectful of the world's meaning of the word. Varied as have been and are the customs and styles of "marriage," the unvarying constant has been the committed *man/woman*, societally recognized, sexual relationship in the interest of social and family stability.

4.....Before there was scientific proof that at least some gays and lesbians are "born that way," it was possible to argue that homosexuality is nothing but a choice, a bad choice, an immoral choice. For some children, sexual orientation can go either way. For their own good and the good of society, they should be gently nudged toward heterosexuality. But science and my experience of students and colleagues have converged to convince me that in many, homosexual orientation is as much a *given* as is heterosexual orientation in most human beings. (At New York Theological Seminary, I had so many homosexual students that they appealed to me to be their subdean.)

5.....Miller rightly distinguishes between civil and religious marriages. My father married thousands in *civil* marriages; & when, in 1937, New York State licensed me for the performance of *religious* marriages, he jokingly suggested that I was "horning in on" his business. / As a United Church of Christ clergyman, I favor homosexual UNIONS of both kinds, civil and religious. (Full disclosure: Unfortunately, my denomination favors both kinds of homosexual MARRIAGE.)

6.....While I agree with Miller that in interpreting the Bible we should "move beyond literalism," we should not move beyond fact. Wrongly, she says that the Bible has nothing to say about "sex between women." Romans 1:26 is precisely on lesbian sex.

7.....Also wrong is she in this statement: "Religious objections to gay marriage are rooted not in the Bible at all, then, but in custom and tradition" and personal revulsion. Read literalistically, of course the Bible has no specific statement against "gay marriage." The Bible sees "marriage" as of divine and human ordering, and homosexual behavior as disorderly (as indeed it usually is: one solid argument for gay unions is that they bring some order into gay sex, the gay life-style). To the biblical authors, "gay marriage" could be only an oxymoron. / Once again, read both literalistically and with the argument from silence, Miller is misleading in stating that "the Bible and Jesus" do not "explicitly define marriage as between one man and one woman." The Bible *assumes* marriage as man/woman: that is the point pertinent to her column.

8.....Miller does not mention that the Bible recognizes and supports marriage as the rite of entrance into society's basic institution, the family. Most societies, including ours, recognize this institutional primacy by providing *special benefits* to the married. Gay unions should have equal rights, but these should not be confused with equal benefits or with equal dignity.

9.....In the Bible, *heterosexuality is assumed* in the vertical metaphor of marriage between God as "husband" to Israel and the Church as the "bride" of Christ. In the background of this biblical metaphor is the primordial mythology of Father Sky and Mother Earth. "Mother Earth" is common in our green-revolution language, though for many, Jesus' favorite reference to God as "Father" has faded.

10.....To answer the "On Faith" question: Scripturally and religiously, a strong case can be made for "gay union." Only a very weak case can be made for "gay marriage."

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 9, 2008; 1:44 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

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Disgusting, Reverend Elliott. You don't get to decide who has equal rights *or* dignity in the eyes of American law, and if you think your religion does, you know where you can put that, too.

I grew up, and spent most of my life, with people like you claiming I was subhuman cause 'people like me,' in your imaginations, *didn't* want to get married, ...now you twist the same line around to claim we're subhuman *for* it finally getting out that we *do.*

Haven't you noticed a common element to what your religion's conservatives say about gays and anyone else you don't want to treat with equal dignity in marriage?

You're. Always. Wrong.

Yes, civil unions would offer me and my sweetie some much-needed protections so we're not subject to your *whims* whenever something else you demand for our country blows up in our faces, as always seems to be happening...

But in the *courts* and under our Constitutional principles, 'separate but equal' is *never* equal.

Just like for other minorities, this isn't about you graciously giving anything to anyone.

This is about America recognizing the same birthright she always does, even when some don't like it or say the Bible cursed or condemned someone for how they were born...

Your religious agenda on this relies on a whole *tissue* of improbabilities and denigrations, many of them self-contradictory, ...and willful ignoring of not only reality, but the experiences and dignity of same-sex couples, ourselves.

Sure. Support civil unions in the populace, that *is* in fact the popular will on this, blocked as it is by too many Christian conservatives.

But the courts can't stop there. Politics are the art of the possible. The courts' business is *Justice.*

Whatever you think about your cause, the means you use against real people are injustice and oppression. No good can come of that. It's corrupt from the start.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 11, 2008 6:11 PM
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"[H]omosexuals never have been and never can be of a dignity equal to heterosexuals, whose psycho-biological development is telic (that is, complete in the sexual sense: the species-survival transition from homo- to heterosexual attraction occurs). In ours and in some other species, homosexuality is a phenomenon of psychobio-underdevelopment."

If I may attempt a paraphrase: homosexuality itself is not a "normal variation" and should not be recognized as equivalent to heterosexuality. Hence, we must not obliterate any and all distinction between hetero- and homosexual unions.

Such abnormality does not mean that one should be cast out of our society, however. Rather, we should allow homosexuals legal rights similar to marriage but maintain certain distinctions because they are inherently different in character (one is "telic" or "normal" and one is not).

This seems very much like a natural law argument against gay marriage, which seems to suffer from the naturalistic fallacy that plagues natural law: you can't get an "ought" from an "is" -- just because hetero marriage is "telic", that does not make it right or better. Ethics cannot derive from teleology or empirical evidence alone; ethics requires authority.

Which brings us back to the question at hand: Does the Bible have any authority, and if so, what kind, and what does the Bible say? On the last question, google Robert Gagnon.

POSTED BY: LACACAFUEGO | DECEMBER 11, 2008 12:55 AM
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I'm sorry, Mr. Elliott, but I don't think I can have a conversation with you on this if you insist on placing homosexuals in a "category" that is undeserving of equal rights. The only reason homosexuals aren't treated with as much dignity as they deserve is because people withhold that dignity, people such as yourself. I really do not mean to sound derogatory here, but there is no good legal, constitutional reason to be denying them the right to MARRIAGE (not a degrading, separating compromise). I would urge you to try not to be so eager to place people into "categories". Women for example are not given maternity leave because they are women. They are given maternity leave because they are giving birth to a baby. I realize men can't give birth, but this deferential treatment in this case is not "awarded" to women because they're in another "category". It has to do with what they're going through medically.

POSTED BY: SPARROWHAWK | DECEMBER 10, 2008 10:56 PM
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SPARROWHAWK, thank you for asking me to clarify.

1

In the eyes of God, EACH of us is a flawed, sinful, limited human being who should treat our "neighbor" (in Jesus' definition, everybody else) as we hope to be treated, with respectful attention and humble intention to be helpful. Jesus is history's standout for the radical putting of this obligation: "Love your enemies."

2

Each of us is both UNIQUE (i.e., like nobody else) and CATEGORICAL (i.e., like everybody else in one's categories [e.g., Chinese, female, young, heterosexual, Muslim]).

3

"We" is both distributive (we individuals) and collective (we in a particular category). As a collectivity, "we" the people are not giving women justice in the workplace if we fail to treat them as a CATEGORY; if we give them only "equal rights" with men, we make no allowance for pregnancies and post-natal needs.

4

We are all born FLAWED - our defective genes invisible, some flaws visible at birth, other flaws visible later. Homosexuality is a later-appearing flaw of arrested development. At home and at school, we should try to teach our children EQUAL RESPECT for every human being regardless of flaws. The proper political dimension of equal respect is EQUAL RIGHTS.

5

In the West (i.e., EurAmerica), "the individual" has emerged as a cultural category more than at any other place-time in human history. Egalitarian autonomy is, indeed, the religion of many. But "the individual" is a social

construct: the human reality is "persons-in-community" and in categories. Hetero and homo couples are instances of "persons-in-community."

6

The philosophy and politics of egalitarian autonomy (e.g., in the "gay pride" movement) conflates rights/benefits/dignity. But actual societies separate these three; and they cannot be merged by legislation.

POSTED BY: ELLIOTTWL | DECEMBER 10, 2008 10:34 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

There can be no moral or ethical basis for withholding dignity and respect for others. In particular when we are talking about loving relationships, as with marriage. Regardless whether it is genetic or a choice, the type of sexuality does not preclude human dignity.

This is the core issue here. And this is why we are talking about civil rights, and immoral and illegal forms of discrimination.

POSTED BY: AGENTG | DECEMBER 10, 2008 10:14 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I am not going to "touch" too much on this topic for Sparrowhawk state it all!

Sparrowhawk- I am very intrigued by your words--fresh of breath air.

In addition, NOBODY has the right to marriage accept for the attending spouses who are seeking marriage. I understand some religion has indifferences to this---that is their and your divine right Mr. Elliott. However, you are not seeking same sex marriage and I fully understand your right not marry such couples. However, what gives you the divine right to place barriers to those of another faith or same faith as you but different outlook--from not marrying same sex couples?

What does same sex marriage has to do with you personally (I am also asking this of those who oppose it) or your own intimate relationship with divinity (God)? Nothing---absolutely nothing. Does this threatened your God? Your belief? Your idea of "family"? If so, then I would sit still and have a personal chat with your Divinity and ask why does this trouble you so? Is your divinity a loving God who accepts all with unconditional/agape love...or do they have "conditions" that is not agape?

I believe most "humans" (especially those in Semitic practices---NOT all---yet the majority) have troubles with separating themselves from others. They have trouble with the concept of what is good for the geese my not be good for the gander.

Why does how one interpret what divinity means to them troubles others? Does my belief system that all is created equal (including marriage) had anything to do with another? It should not...therefore, I ask those who oppose this---to look within vs. looking without.

With all do respect and blessings

POSTED BY: PALLASATHENA1 | DECEMBER 10, 2008 5:28 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"But as a human CATEGORY, homosexuals never have been and never can be of a dignity equal to heterosexuals"

"we are to treat one another as God-created persons, not as categories."

I'm not going to accuse you of being contradictory, but I think you should clarify your first statement about homosexuals as a "category" that can never have equal dignity. It doesn't seem to fit well with your following statement about treating each other not as categories.

But like I said I don't want to put thoughts in your head, so I'll assume your first statement was you recognizing something about society as a whole...or the fact that homosexuals are not given equal dignity by society.

If in fact you do recognize that we shouldn't treat people as belonging to categories, and that homosexuals aren't treated with the dignity they deserve, then how can you deny them their right to marriage? What I'm getting at here is that dignity is something one receives from others, not an inherent quality of a person. If they deserve as much human dignity as anyone else, it is up to US to show them this dignity, and treat them with dignity. All this junk about arriving at "compromises" is in itself symptomatic of the fact that they're not being treated with dignity. Giving someone part of what they're asking for because you're afraid to give them all of it is not dignity, it's a mockery of dignity.

You can create all the compromise terms you want: civil unions, whatever. But the fact is that by denying these people their RIGHT to marriage, and forcing them to accept table-scrap compromises like civil unions, you ARE in fact relegating them to another category, and denying them equal standing because you think they belong to a (face it) lesser class of people. I for one am sick of all the excuses and shoddy reasoning behind denying these people their dignity. Yes, this country may have a christian heritage or a predominantly christian population, but unless you can come up with a GOOD (ie, logical non-religious reason) reason to deny them this right, they should have it. I guess what I'm saying is, if you want to divide people into classes based on their sexuality, you're free to do so, but don't be hypocritical about it. This isn't just about simple semantics. This isn't some petty fight over whether or not they get to use the word "marriage" or not. Being a homosexual does not make you any less of a human being, so it shouldn't be okay to treat them like less of a human being.

POSTED BY: SPARROWHAWK | DECEMBER 10, 2008 2:59 PM
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RESPONSE TO WINDREADER:

1

The compromise I suggested, and that became law in Vermont, was between those who opposed equal rights for gays & those who insisted that the law use the word "marriage." My move to "union" was to ACHIEVE what you rightly insist on, which is equal "rights."

2

What Vermont passed disproves your statement: "equal" rights were achieved specifically by SEPARATION of "union" from "marriage."

4

My "nudge" suggestion was limited to hormonal-MIDDLE children, who could move in either direction. Suicide is a possibility only when clearly gay children are pushed (not just "nudged") to go straight.

6

Your argument from silence is weak. Little can be concluded from what Jesus - or anybody else - did NOT say.

8

I agree with you on "the 'inherent worth and dignity' of all." EQUAL dignity is something else. I have known, and know, some gays who are personally of GREATER human dignity than most straights: more gifted and/or more disciplined in developing what gifts God has given them. But as a human CATEGORY, homosexuals never have been and never can be of a dignity equal to heterosexuals, whose psycho-biological development is telic (that is, complete in the sexual sense: the species-survival transition from homo- to hetero- sexual attraction occurs). In ours and in some other species, homosexuality is a phenomenon of psychobio-underdevelopment. / But the Bible is clear about INDIVIDUALS: we are to treat one another as God-created persons, not as categories.

POSTED BY: ELLIOTTWL | DECEMBER 10, 2008 1:58 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

1) Compromise? Sorry if I am reticent to compromise my status as a full and equal citizen with all the rights associated.

2) Theory is fine, but reality and history clearly indicate that separate is never equal.

4) Society has done a lot to 'nudge' questioning people towards heterosexuality. This opinion also 'nudges' them towards suicide and other self-harming behaviors. Acceptance and celebration of the full diversity of humanity is more appropriate, in my mind.

6) Jesus is not quoted as having any opinion or teaching related to same-sex relationships. His followers added all of the NT opinions on the topic.

8) Not equal dignity? As a Unitarian Universalist who embraces the 'inherent worth and dignity' of all I will not dignify that bias.

POSTED BY: WINDREADER | DECEMBER 10, 2008 12:55 PM

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