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Fear, Ignorance, or Prejudice: Unanswered Questions

“It seems that we’re all here,” I said. “I can sense weariness in the air; any misgivings? Are there any questions that will help us to get started? Ms. Lewis.”

“Thank you. I’d hoped that tonight we could go back to the point Ms. Vanhurst made during her initial presentation when she referred to the Catholic Church’s uncompromising opposition to homosexual behavior and gay marriage somewhat sarcastically. She said that the social consequences of approving these unions were comparable to pandemic flu, if I recall correctly, as if fear was totally unwarranted or exaggerated. And yet, what we heard from Captain Francis suggests that there might be something to it. Would anyone be able to explain this further?”

“Yeah, I think I can answer that,” said Ms. Vanhurst.

“You’re right, my tone was a bit sarcastic, but I did it to drive forth the point that the Church does seem to believe that homosexual behavior is transmissible and because I was playing the role of the devil’s advocate. Your question, however, is valid. But, what we need to find out is whether the Church’s alarmist tone is grounded on facts or fear, or both?

“For example, I don’t know that the Church would side with comments attributed to Sen. Tom Coburn, an otherwise very gutsy and principled politician when it comes to earmarking. He’s been quoted as saying that, *The gay community has infiltrated the very centers of power in every area across this country, and they wield extreme power. That agenda is the greatest threat to our freedom that we face today.*¹

“The senator from Oklahoma isn’t the only to have such beliefs. Around the time President Bush had announced support for a constitutional amendment supporting the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman in 2004, over sixty organizations representing their version of family and religious values, published a full-page letter in the media expressing their support for the President, stating, *We can think of no more crucial issue for our*

*nation than the preservation of the institution of marriage.*²

“Frankly, I would’ve thought that any threat we may face as a nation today would be defined in more relative terms following 9-11 and a national war against terrorism. So, when it’s suggested that gays have infiltrated the very centers of power, I immediately thought about the presidency, congressional leaders, Supreme Court Justices. I mean, are gays taking over the government by any chance? Do we have to call in the National Guard?

“Let’s get serious, are these pronouncements in line with White House priorities? In his July 2002 letter to the American people detailing his National Strategy for Homeland Security, President Bush states, *The U.S. government has no more important mission than protecting the homeland from future terrorist attacks.*³ This would suggest that in less than two years, either the threat of terrorism had subsided considerably, or that gays and lesbians have been running rampant all over the country. Something is out of focus here.

“Do we know if there are gays in the centers of power today? Maybe. Do gays have an agenda to convert the good ole’ U.S. of A into queerland? I don’t know, but I don’t think so. Is there fear among many out there that the gay agenda may convert them into homosexuals? I think so, but that’s kept kinda secret; you don’t ever want to tell others that you’re afraid of becoming gay or lesbian.

“Further, is there fear or concern among many straight individuals that the phenomenon could spread to younger generations? You bet there is! Is the concern warranted? This is the question Ms. Lewis wants answered.”

“I’m not trying to be smart,” interrupted Mr. Edson, “but, you’re suggesting—or actually, the Religious Right is—that homosexual behavior is transmissible to heterosexuals. I’m trying to envision how it might happen. Are we going to have any warnings? Any symptoms ahead of time that could make us prevent it from happening?”

“I haven’t read anything coming out of the Opposition regarding how homosexuality may be transmissible,” said Ms. Vanhurst. “But having read enough about human sexuality, I’m gonna go out on a limb and speculate what the Opposition is so concerned about.

“Sex is a powerful drive; it’s pleasurable, cathartic, energizing. It’s also mysterious; it’s enticing, tempting, and seductive. I also believe that the sex drive is inherent in all human beings, although it may be dormant in individuals suffering from very serious mental and/or physical disabilities. Certainly, we can say that almost all humans are capable of experiencing or feeling sexuality.

“Sex also can be expressed romantically,” she continued, “whereby the couple shares feelings of care and love for each other. Sex can manifest itself violently, as in the case of rape. And, sex, no doubt, can also be indulged selfishly and hedonistically, seeking only one’s own gratification. Aside of the violent manifestation of sex, it’s this last aspect—self-indulging sexuality—that concerns the Opposition. It also concerns me.

“It’s not that someone will put a homosexual spell over you, Michael,” continued Ms. Vanhurst. “If anything would do it, it would be your desire to experience sex hedonistically. If you allow yourself to follow a craving for the mysterious, to explore something . . . kinky, for lack of a better word, and add to this desire sex’s alluring characteristics, the constant bombardment of sexuality in a permissive environment that validates and promotes all forms of sexual relationships, including homosexuality, as an alternative lifestyle, it’s quite possible that some people would be prompted or tempted to try out something exotic, something new. In the end, these external elements could seduce you to try it out.

“You see, when you behave this way, you’re not seeking to satisfy the other person; you’re only after your own gratification. This is the Opposition’s concern, that acceptance of homosexuality may lead to *the erosion of heterosexuality as the single acceptable sexual pattern in our culture*, as Charles Socarides had expressed.”⁴

“Are you suggesting that all homosexual behavior is self-indulgent?” asked Mr. Edson.

“No, what I’m suggesting is that, at times, homosexual behavior is self-indulgent. But, let me emphasize that what I just said applies to heterosexuality as well. Sex is sex, as the Captain had observed, and I think that society today has shown us incidents of sexual behavior among homosexuals that correspond to all three categories: romantic involvement, rape, and pure and simple self-gratification.”

“That means that what you said about how tempting, seductive, and self-indulging sex can be would also apply to heterosexuals as well,” stressed Mr. Edson.

“Yes, most definitely,” claimed Ms. Vanhurst. “Today, there’s probably more self-indulging sex going on among heterosexuals than among homosexuals, the reason being that there are more heterosexuals than homosexuals and bisexuals.”

“If that’s the case, and self-indulging sex is equivalent to sin and immorality, what you’re saying is that there’s more sinfulness and immorality among heterosexuals today than among homosexuals, so, why the concern? Why not try to reform heterosexuals as well?” he asked.

“Now we’re talking some differences!” she exclaimed. “The Catholic Church in the United States appears to be equally concerned with the misuse of sex regardless of sexual orientation. For some reason, the Catholic viewpoint seems to be more balanced in its approach than the Religious Right.

“On the other hand, at least from the vantage point of what the media projects about the Religious Right, there seems to be a much greater concern among fundamentalist Christians with homosexuality as immorality than with immoral behavior among heterosexuals. Fundamentalist opposition to homo-

sexuality is so much in disproportion with its opposition to self-indulging heterosexual sex that it makes you wonder if the movement isn't ignoring, or even tacitly condoning the latter."

"Woow," exclaimed Mr. Edson.

"May I say something?" asked Mr. Hunt. "While I agree that Fundamentalism has shown a stronger and more vicious opposition toward homosexual sins than toward heterosexual sins, this is not by far a Fundamentalist phenomenon; moderates and even some liberals have joined in. The 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was approved overwhelmingly by conservatives, moderates, and liberals in both houses, and signed by President Clinton, a not-so-conservative politician. This measure was a bi-partisan, bi-ideological, multi-denominational effort intended to *protect the institution of marriage* by defending it against, what? Against homosexuality. And then, as Ms. Vanhurst indicated, sort of like buying extra insurance coverage, in 2004 President Bush called for a constitutional amendment to protect marriage even more, against homosexuality.

"We should note that President Obama has been against DOMA because it limits the equal rights and benefits of lesbians, gays, bi-sexuals, and transgender (LGBT) couples. He's gone on record indicating that he wants to repeal DOMA, although through congressional legislation.

"Now, inasmuch as I'm not totally sold on the gay agenda, I have to admit that there must be some degree of social blindness and prejudice throughout the evolution of the anti-gay movement. Those politicians and the people that supported the Act, could they have been oblivious to the fact that, for decades, the institution of marriage has been undermined by none other than heterosexuals?"

"Now you're accusing the politicians for the demise of marriage as an institution!" remarked Ms. Williamson. "Boy, they seem to get it from all sides."

"Ms. Williamson," called out Mr. Hunt, "have we ever heard these politicians express any concerns about how laws they themselves passed to facilitate divorce were weakening marriage? Did we hear the politicians denounce how frivolously and irresponsibly the entertainment industry has dealt with the institution for the past three decades? And what about our own social permissiveness to heterosexual cohabitation? Has it strengthened marriage? Have public officials learned anything from studies showing the enormous social cost of broken families borne by the taxpayer that could have led to preventive social policies?"

"So many things have contributed to weaken the institution of marriage: secularism; economic instability; the passive and outdated role of religious institutions; the role of the entertainment media and the sexual revolution; the absence of governmental leadership; the social and economic emancipation of women; the emphasis on individualism, self-gratification, and personal freedom over

sense of duty and personal commitment. You name it! This has been the work of heterosexuals, including heterosexual politicians.

“Surely, federal, state, and local elected officials are aware that just about anyone can get a license to get married, including individuals with physical and mental disorders; people with criminal records; former child abusers; transvestites, even gays and lesbians, if when the couple shows up at the court for a license. We require a certain amount of education to graduate from high school or to get a degree and become engineers, electricians, plumbers, doctors, lawyers; yet we are not required to be educated or to learn anything about marriage prior to getting a marriage license. Has the government bothered to find out what the future of our libertarian society holds if the trend continues in which the number of married families with children continue to dwindle and possibly disappear in the next generation or so? What will be the social, public health, and economic consequences of these changes? Has the government come out with any recommendations, any policies? Given this absence of concern, do you mean to tell me that homosexuals represent the greatest threat to heterosexual marriage?”

“It’s not only the politicians,” interrupted Ms. Vanhurst. “If we look closely, we’ll notice that Fundamentalism, the supposed bedrock of marriage, hasn’t done well protecting the institution either. Stephanie Coontz, an expert on the history of marriage points out to studies showing that divorce and out-of-wedlock births are higher among low-income areas of the South, where born-again Christians thrive, and about the same as the divorce rate of non-Fundamentalist Christians, including the born-again, atheists, and agnostics.”⁵

“Not to be missed, according to the author of a book published by a family oriented institution, forty percent of American children do not have their fathers at home!”⁶

“Still” replied Ms. Williamson, “somehow I think Mr. Hunt may not be seeing the entire picture. We have discussed, and agreed, that the entertainment media is among the largest conveyor belts of values in our society through the images and behavior it projects. Now, you take shows such as *Sex and the City*, or *Desperate Housewives*. Do you believe these are shows that enhance the institution of marriage?”

“I’ve never watched *Sex and the City*, but given what’ve heard, No, I don’t think so,” replied Mr. Hunt. “As to *Desperate Housewives*—which I have watched—I would say that a group of dysfunctional adults constantly acting like adolescents becomes boring and downright stupid after four weeks of the same stuff. But, I agree with you. Still, what are you trying to say?”

“Who do you think are the creators of these programs? A gay person. Now, you tell me!” argued Ms. Williamson.

“I’m not saying that many gays won’t bring with them values that are different from yours and mine,” he replied, “but so do many heterosexuals. Gays are

not the only ones who create images and behavior patterns that undermine marriage. In fact, do you really think it matters that a gay person created *Desperate Housewives*? Wouldn't more significant be the ones who are actually responsible for putting it on the air? Guess who put *Desperate Housewives* on the air? None other than Mickey Mouse. The Walt Disney Company owns ABC and ultimately is responsible for programming. Are the heads of the Walt Disney Company gay? And, what about Fox? It claims to be an overall family values-oriented operation while a lot of its programming indicates the opposite. Now, if you can prove that the top executives of all these media companies are gay, I'll donate my next paycheck to Senator Coburn's political campaign."

"I see your point, Mr. Hunt, and yours too, Melanie," said Ms. Lewis. "I'm not arguing one way or another, but I don't quite understand how it's possible for heterosexuals to organize all this opposition to homosexuality as a means to protect marriage without noticing that we heterosexuals might just be marriage's worst enemy!"

"I have to agree with Ms. Lewis," I said, "as well as admit that, having been divorced twice, I carry my share of responsibility in having contributed to weakening the institution. I don't say this lightly, mind you. That is why one has to wonder about what Mr. Hunt just said." I went to the white board and underlined the phrase I had written earlier in the evening: *fear, ignorance, prejudice*.

"Perhaps," said Captain Francis referring to the phrase. "There are reasonable homosexual activists, like Andrew Sullivan, who have debated—persuasively, I think—just about every argument the Opposition has put out every now and then against gay marriage. Sullivan's approach, mind you, tends to be quite moving. He wrote something once, with some degree of exaggeration, I think, denoting a very defensive posture on his part. But, from a human standpoint, it reaches your guts. Let me read to you all this passage:

*I have been invited to my fair share of weddings. At no point, I think, has it dawned on any of the participants that I was being invited to a ceremony from which I was legally excluded. I have heard no apologies, no excuses, no reassurances that the couple marrying would support my own marriage or my legal right to it. Friends mention their marriages with ease and pleasure without it even occurring to them that they are flaunting a privilege constructed specifically to stigmatize the person they are talking to. They are not bad people; they are not homophobes. They just don't get it. And some, of course, never will.*⁷

"I don't think that the institution of marriage intentionally seeks to stigmatize gays, although inadvertently it makes many homosexuals feel bad when civil laws

prevent them from partaking in an institution that heterosexuals obviously enjoy. I would have to agree with Ms. Vanhurst, in that I wouldn't relish being the victim of any kind of stigma. And yet, despite trying to feel empathy and accepting the logic of Sullivan's explanations, there is something inside of me that, while I think is not prejudice, tells me that a legal definition of marriage shouldn't include gays.

"Take a table, for example. One doesn't just start calling a table a chair all of a sudden, even when at times someone may use a table to sit on it. I mean, how could we communicate among ourselves if we decide to call an automobile an airplane simply because it transports people from one location to another? We're not talking about simple words; I'm not advancing an etymological rationale to oppose gay marriage. I'm talking about a social construct, a custom, indeed, an institution that has been defined as something specific throughout thousands and thousands of years!

"Actually, these are my only reasons. We can't legislate opposition to gay marriage on religious grounds; it would be unconstitutional. Also, it's illogical and unreasonable to oppose gay marriage because gays can't procreate; some heterosexuals can't either; or because it would debase the institution—we already do a lousy job ourselves; or because heterosexual marriage is a historical tradition—social traditions are not carved in stone; or because homosexuality doesn't contribute to character building—tell that to those who have given their lives for their country. None of these reasons carry any weight.

"So here I am, questioning my attitude regarding gay marriage on moral grounds and on grounds of functionality and original intent. But, in the end, I'm left to struggle with my inner conflict: on the one hand, I'm not ready to start calling a table a chair, because I think the term *table* would definitely lose its significance. On the other hand, if I don't start calling a table a chair, numerous chairs made of nerve endings, feelings, emotions, a heart, a mind, and that, in the end, look so much like tables . . . well, these chairs are going to have no place at the banquet. And that's my dilemma."

"Mine is similar," said Mr. Hunt. "I'm at odds over this issue. I realize that many within the Opposition hold their beliefs in earnest. At the same time, once you begin to notice how much damage they and other heterosexuals have brought about to the institution of marriage, it makes you wonder whether subconscious prejudice lurks beneath moral activism."

"We all have our dilemmas, Mr. Hunt," I said. "It comes from living amidst conflicting values and, in this case, differences in behavior."

Ms. Lewis raised her hand. "I've read about how social prejudice in the past prevented racial integration in our society; how white folks felt when they saw a white woman in the arms of a black man. I also understand that we even developed a theology of segregation; Thomas Jefferson came close to formulat-

ing scientific boundaries to explain segregation, boundaries that either his libido or Ms. Hemings' beauty helped him to overcome. For a long time, racial discrimination prevailed rather strongly, but then, it began to subside. Could this happen in the case of gay marriage? Because if it does, there's hope that society would overcome its gay prejudice in time."

"I think it goes beyond prejudice, Ms. Lewis," said Mr. Wasserman. "Yes, prejudice is bad; it's an indication of ignorance because it means being reluctant to acquire sufficient information or knowledge about the issue that would indicate the possibility of one holding inaccurate views or beliefs."

"But what happens when you have accurate information and you simply don't like what the issue is about? What happens when someone turns you off, precisely because of what you learn or what you see, in this case on account of a specific type of behavior?"

"All of us got on Mr. Edson's case because we didn't seem to like how he behaved, or actually, how he spoke. Fine, but at least he had the choice of modifying his behavior once he realized that he was being disrespectful. However, what about if I'm turned off by homosexual behavior, even though I realize there's nothing gays and lesbians can do about it? I mean, you have this image that the media conveyed, that TV drama series about gays and lesbians, what was it called?"

"Queer as Folk and the L Word."

"Yeah, I think so, the ones in which there's a lot of hedonistic sex going on. Well, this is the image of homosexuality that I have, and . . . well, it turns me off; it's not the type of people with whom I would associate."

"Mr. Wasserman," I called out, "perhaps, your prejudice consists of believing that all gays and lesbians are that immodest. Tell me something, do you also get turned off by heterosexuals when you watch *Sex and the City* or *Desperate Housewives* or an R-rated movie with heterosexual sex in it?"

"No, I don't, but that's because I don't dislike heterosexual sex; it's what I am. But I do find gay sex, kind of repugnant. But, am I supposed to change my feelings to please someone? Does that mean that in order for me not to be prejudiced I have to like gay marriage?"

"Let's go back to what Ms. Lewis said a minute ago," I requested. "I'm sure many white people used to find the idea of a blonde woman in the arms of a black man quite repugnant, too. Likely, some still do today. Well, suppose this black man not only treats that blonde woman nicely, but actually loves her, cares for her, cares for their children, works hard, and is a moral and law-abiding citizen who behaves properly in public. Would there be a reason to dislike or treat this person badly because of the color of his skin?"

"Could it be that someone who's prejudiced toward blacks discriminates against them because his idea of a black person is a black dude who's committing crime, pimping prostitutes or fathering children out-of-wedlock just to enhance an already poor image of manhood?"

“Who do you see when you look at a gay or a lesbian? Someone who’s a good person, someone like you, or the guys and gals from *Queer As Folk* and *the L Word*, who, by the way, would turn me off, too? That’s the difference between prejudice and acceptance. Prejudice prejudges ahead of time; it generalizes from a partial and usually negative image of a group of people to their totality. Imagine you telling us that you don’t like music on the basis of having heard only classical tunes. It’s okay not to like a musical genre, but you don’t want to convey the notion that all music is classical, hence bad!”

“May we get back to my question?” Ms. Lewis requested.

“Which one?” I asked.

“I was interested in knowing on what evidence the Opposition is basing its concern that homosexuality can spread socially. Ms. Vanhurst gave me an initial answer that I find intriguing, that sex being sex, if enjoyed in a hedonistic way, could lead to people trying it out in ways that would give them pleasure. I do believe that this is possible, particularly in the type of society we live in which not only entices you sexually but even dares you to loosen up inhibitions to try the unusual, the bizarre. Do we know if there are studies that might at least suggest that this is happening?”

“Well, now that you mention the bizarre; another term for it is *exotic*,” said Captain Francis. “Professor Bem, whose study I referred to last week, has an interesting theory of sexual orientation that is supported by empirical evidence. His study suggests that cultural environment plays a significant role in the sexual orientation of men and women. Bem believes that a combination of biological elements and cultural norms, throughout the evolution of humankind, have resulted in the majority of us being sexually oriented toward reproduction and heterosexuality.

“Bem further suggests that heterosexuality occurs when biological factors are coupled with cultural reinforcements, namely activities among heterosexual boys and girls that conform to their gender. This combination gives way to gender polarization or deeply felt internal differences that each gender regards as exotic—we might even say mysterious or unusual—in the opposite gender, early on in life. In time, that which they regard as exotic in the opposite sex becomes something attractive; it becomes transformed into erotic/romantic attraction.

“What keeps the heterosexual process going, according to Bem, is this condition of gender polarization that accounts for the way in which boys and girls see each other during childhood and which, later on in life, will attract them to each other.

“In the case of homosexuality, the process is quite the opposite, he points out. These are children who early in life are gender non-conforming, meaning that, far from feeling different from the opposite gender, they feel themselves

different from same-sex children, even perceiving them as, exotic. As they grow older, they become sexually/romantically attracted to those they initially perceived as different, in this case, same-sex members.

"But, by far, Bem's most relevant view to the question that Ms. Lewis raised is that he maintains that, since culture reinforces gender polarization, long-term cultural changes redefining gender conformity would in turn result in a less gender-polarized society. This process could then lead to a culture with a diversity of sexual orientations:

[A] culture that did not systematically estrange its children from either opposite-sex or same-sex peers. [Children's] erotic and romantic preferences would simply crystallize around a more diverse and idiosyncratic variety of attributes. Gentlemen might still prefer blonds, but some of those gentlemen (and some ladies) would prefer blonds of any sex.⁸

"If I understand you correctly, Captain," I remarked, "this process amounts to social transmissibility of homosexuality, correct?"

"I think that properly speaking we may want to say that, according to this process, homosexuality would be culturally generated," said the captain. "From the standpoint of concerns the Church has expressed about the spread of homosexuality, Bem's point isn't something to be taken lightly.

"Bem, who would not regard himself as representing the Opposition, even suggests that if society were to sanction different sexual norms, *we could all learn to enjoy sexual relations with either sex.*⁹ This is, precisely, the point that Ms. Vanhurst made when she talked about sex's attributes."

"So, we're talking about homosexuality reaching pandemic levels!" said an alarmed Ms. Williamson.

"Let me put it this way," said the captain. "Are there cultural factors that may contribute to erosion in gender polarization? Bem believes so; he indicates that the feminist movement, for example, already has played a role in narrowing down the differences. He still believes that there'll always be sufficient biological sex differences to account for a majority of the population being heterosexual,¹⁰ which means that he doesn't foresee the end of human life on earth as we know it."

"Yes, Mr. Edson, you can exhale and safely breathe now," I said after his brief "hooray."

"That's not all," continued Captain Francis. "We then have Professor Lisa Diamond, who has done extensive research, particularly on the issue of bisexuality and sexual fluidity. Professor Diamond believes that if society were to validate homosexuality, it could, indeed, lead some individuals to experiment with same-sex sexuality. Whether or not that experimentation would result in heterosexuals permanently becoming homosexuals—the issue of transmissibility of orientation—she asserts that, unless these individuals have an inherent predisposition toward homosexuality, *such experimentation will be*

short-lived. In a nutshell, Diamond doesn't think that sexual orientation itself can be culturally transmissible.¹¹

"So, there you have it. These researchers seem to indicate that we're not talking about pandemic levels of homosexuality, although Bem, I think, would accept the possibility of higher numbers than Diamond would. Now, if you ask me, to what extent, to what levels, I think that's anyone's guess."

"Interesting, quite interesting, Captain," I commented. "What other points should we discuss at this time?"

"I believe we have barely touched on the issue of homosexuality and children," replied Mr. Hunt. "We're now beginning to see how new social norms are inevitably being forced unto children. I'm talking about homosexual high school students holding hands and hugging their same-sex steady friends. There is little doubt that homosexuality is quickly stepping outside the bedroom and into places it's never been before. Additionally, the Opposition is quite concerned that children are vulnerable in the sense that some are not given the "opportunity" to become heterosexual, referring to cases of adoption or lesbian parents raising their children."

"I agree," responded Ms. Williamson. "No one has said anything about the children! Do we know how children would be affected by gay marriage? I imagine the courts will continue to allow all sorts of experimentation involving children. Already, lesbians have been artificially inseminated to have their own children. There'll be more cases in which homosexual and heterosexual men begin to sell or freely give their sperms to lesbian customers or friends. Gay couples will likely hire strangers to deliver them children that otherwise they could not have. Orphans will continue to be adopted by gay and lesbian couples."

"What is your point? Ms. Williamson," I asked.

"Well, is the Opposition ready to admit that it's better to have an orphan grow up without any parents rather than have gay ones? One thing we tend to forget is that there will always be late bloomers, gays and lesbians who discover—or hide—their homosexuality until after they have married and have children with a heterosexual spouse. So, should we care about this, or is this issue only about adults?"

"Yes, Captain."

"I believe Mr. Hunt and Ms. Williamson have a valid point. We haven't touched upon the issue of children, which in the view of the Opposition is, perhaps, a more significant issue than gay adults. After all, there are quite a few gay parents who either want to keep their own children, have their own, or adopt them. The Opposition, meanwhile, is concerned that gay or lesbian parents will try to influence their children's behavior into becoming gays and lesbians."

"Why would that be an issue?" asked Mr. Edson. "It's not as if today's gays

and lesbians came from gay and lesbian parents!"

"Well, in a way you're right," Captain Francis responded. "I suppose it's realistic to believe that, unless the Opposition finds a way to prevent homosexuality, in all likelihood, there'll always be gays and lesbians. Nonetheless, there are two points that I need to make. If, indeed, the influence that culture plays in legitimizing homosexual behavior could lead to increased homosexuality, as both Ms. Vanhurst and Professor Bem have suggested, I'm sure the Opposition would want to reverse any social tendency of this sort.

"Second, the Opposition would say that it's not the same for someone to be born or become homosexual early in childhood, as it is to stimulate or influence homosexual behavior in a child. The belief is that, with gay parents, children may not have the necessary freedom to develop heterosexually."

"Has that been proven?" asked Mr. Hunt

"That's an interesting, if delicate, question," suggested Ms. Vanhurst. "First, let me say that this is an area that reflects the ongoing conflict between the Pro gay and the Opposition movements, too. For example, in 2002, the governing body of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy statement approving co-parenting and second-parent adoption by same-sex parents, on the basis of its review of the professional literature. It suggested that, *Children with parents who are homosexual have the same advantages and the same expectations for health, adjustment and development as children whose parents are heterosexual.*¹²

"I do want to point out, as Captain Francis did before, that the decision was taken by the governing body, and we can't tell if there are deep-seated disagreements or not on this issue within the membership at large, since we don't know how the entire membership voted, or even if it did.

"Then, we have the testimony presented by Dr. Ellen Perrin, a pediatrician who was the primary author of the report that led the AAP to its policy and who considers herself *the pediatrician most expert in the country on this topic*, meaning children of gay and lesbian parents. In her testimony she was very emphatic in rejecting public statements made by the Opposition regarding the harm that gay marriage will bring to the institution of the family. She affirmed, *I can tell you that this allegation has no valid scientific basis whatsoever.* And, quoting from AAP's policy, Dr. Perrin claimed that *children who grow up with gay or lesbian parents fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual.*¹³

"More or less around the same time period, Steven Nock, professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia, reviewed very similar literature published in *peer-reviewed journals prior to 2001*. In a public interview with National Public Radio, Professor Nock addressed the reason for his observation that the published evidence was lacking because of questionable methodology: the samples used in the studies, he said, *were self-recruited*. In other

words, *individuals [had] volunteered to participate in these studies as a result of seeing an ad or a flier or being approached by a friend or a contact.*¹⁴

“The issue Professor Nock raised dealt with inherent difficulties in properly designing these types of studies. One of the difficulties was that of overcoming scientific bias. For example, there was a case involving Professor Charlotte Patterson, a professor of Child Psychology also at the University of Virginia, whose study suggesting that children of gay and lesbian parents were as well-adjusted emotionally and otherwise as children of heterosexual parents was questioned. Her personal studies were eventually excluded as evidence from a Florida court. We’re told that Dr. Patterson had refused to turn over documentation that showed that *her research was possibly tainted by her alleged use of friends as subjects for her research.*”¹⁵

“As an example of activism, the Opposition, in this case the Family Policy Network, did not waste time in stressing that Dr. Patterson was a lesbian activist who, at the time, was living with a female partner and raising three children, suggesting, perhaps, that her impartiality was a dubious proposition on account of her homosexuality.”

“Well, but, doesn’t that view also suggest a bias?” asked Mr. Dickerson. “Should we also rule out research by heterosexuals who conclude that children become emotionally affected and become dysfunctional when raised by gays and lesbians because of the authors’ heterosexual orientation?”

“Very good point, Mr. Dickerson,” I said.

“If I may raise another question,” continued Mr. Dickerson, “do we know if children are likely to have their behavior influenced by their adopted gay parents? I presume that it has to be a concern, too.”

“I believe Mr. Dickerson is referring to whether supposedly heterosexual children could become homosexual on account of their parents’ homosexuality,” said Ms. Vanhurst. “This goes back to the issue of transmissibility of sexual orientation.

“The first obstacle we have to overcome in considering your question is that the AAP doesn’t regard homosexuality as an illness or an abnormality, thus, why even ask the question. In other words, why care about something that is not a problem, even if it is a *problem* for others?

“Anyhow, in the midst of this dispute, along comes another sociologist, Judith Stacey. Like Professor Bem, Stacey doesn’t cherish becoming the Opposition’s poster hero; they both oppose the Religious Right’s views on this issue, and both accept homosexuality as a normal variation of sexual behavior. Nonetheless, the distinguishing characteristic that both Stacey and Bem possess in this deeply polarizing issue is that, like Robert Spitzer and others, they have sought to undertake their studies with utmost objectivity and independent of any political agenda.

“In their study, Stacey and her colleague, Timothy Biblarz, take issue with

findings, *almost uniformly*, that there are *no notable differences between children reared by heterosexual parents and those reared by lesbian and gay parents*.¹⁶

"I'm telling you, this study is great. Stacey, it seems, reminds her colleagues that the issue of lesbian parenthood is simply too recent for studies to provide the necessary reliability that conclusions would require. As a result, she adds, *these unique historical conditions make it impossible to fully distinguish the impact of parent's sexual orientation on a child*.

"And, adding to what Nock has said, Stacey indicated that *researchers lack reliable data on the number and location of lesbian parents with children in the general population, and that most studies rely on small-scale, snowball, and convenience samples drawn primarily from personal and community networks or agencies*.

"The most relevant point she makes addresses Mr. Hunt's concern; she acknowledges that the presence of *ideological pressures constrain intellectual development in this field*, leading *anti-gay scholars [to] seek evidence of harm, [while] sympathetic researchers defensively stress its absence*.

"We may recall that this is how Captain Francis had described the polarizing tendencies of the two groups," added Ms. Vanhurst. "Captain, you now have the support of an objective scientist on your side, congrats!" she remarked with a smirk on her face.

"Nonetheless, in a strong criticism of the anti-gay literature," continued Ms. Vanhurst, "Stacey reprimands scholars who *offer only limited, and often implicit, theoretical explanations for the disadvantages of same-sex parenting*, on account of heterosexual bias. However, she then turns around and suggests that this bias is responsible as well for missteps in the research by those who are more sympathetic to gay marriage!

"I'm gonna try to make it short and simple. Here's a listing of the literature reviewed by Stacey and Biblarz focusing on those aspects that, on account of their bias, the original authors had overlooked in their studies." As the class passed around her handout, she continued, "You'll find that:

- *Lesbian mothers reported that their children, especially daughters, more frequently dress, play, and behave in ways that do not conform to sex-typed cultural norms. Remember Bem?*
- *Daughters of lesbian mothers reported greater interest in activities associated with both "masculine" and "feminine" qualities that involve the participation of both sexes, whereas daughters of heterosexual mothers report significantly greater interest in traditionally feminine, same-sex activities.*
- *Daughters with lesbian mothers reported higher aspirations to nontraditional gender occupations (doctors, lawyers, and engineers), as opposed to housewives, I guess, which by the way, nothing wrong with that in my book.*

- *On some measures, like aggressiveness and play preferences, the sons of lesbian mothers behave in less traditionally masculine ways than those raised by heterosexual mothers; something that is going to raise a bunch of eyebrows and a lot of hell among the macho Right, I suppose.*
- *Young boys (4-8) conceived through Donor Insemination (DI) in lesbian co-mother families scored the lowest on a measure of sex-typed masculine behaviors; DI boys in heterosexual two parent families were somewhat more sex-typed, while “naturally” conceived boys in heterosexual two-parent families received the highest sex-typed masculine scores.*
- *A significantly greater proportion of young adult children raised by lesbian mothers than those raised by heterosexual mothers [in one study] reported having had a homoerotic relationship. The young adults reared by lesbian mothers were also significantly more likely to report having thought they might experience homoerotic attraction or relationships. Sixty-four percent of the young adults raised by lesbian mothers report having considered same-sex relationships, compared with only seventeen percent of those raised by heterosexual mothers. Stacey and Biblarz do stress, however, that, in the end, parental influence on children’s sexual desires is neither direct nor easily predictable, pointing out that seventeen percent of those raised by heterosexual mothers also report some openness to same-sex relationships, while thirty-six percent of those raised by lesbians do not.*
- *One of the studies provides evidence of a moderate degree of parent-to-child transmission of sexual orientation.*
- *A mother’s own gender identity may mediate the connection between maternal sexual orientation and maternal gender preferences for her children.*
- *And, last one, another study suggested that heterosexual mothers would emphasize more that their boys engage in masculine activities and their girls in feminine ones, [while] lesbian mothers had no such interests.*

“In spite of these observations,” Ms. Vanhurst continued, “it’s interesting that the study is, nevertheless, in agreement with results in other studies indicating that children being raised by gay and lesbian parents are not affected, emotionally or intellectually, any more than children raised by heterosexual parents. This is not to say that that some may not experience social stigma, which no doubt may cause serious distress. But then, again, many heterosexual children and adults experience stigma on account of things that make them different from others, as we know.”

“Melanie, would it be correct to assume that much of what Stacey and Biblarz report in their study dovetails rather significantly with what Bem had to say about the influence of the environment on sexual orientation?” asked Mr.

Edson.

"That would be correct, Not only that, but to the chagrin of both, their views seem to support the views of the Opposition. Kinda cool, isn't?" she laughed.

"It may be cool for you Ms. Vanhurst," judged Ms. Williamson, "but where does that leave us in terms of the issue? In my view, these latest observations, including yours, would seem to corroborate the Opposition's concerns, as well as mine, regarding homosexuality!"

"I agree, but only to some extent," she shot back. "I don't think that the Opposition is entirely off the hook on this issue. The Opposition needs to come up with answers to the questions we raised, and it hasn't. Take a look, for example, at the implication of the document by Pope Benedict XVI seeking to restrict men with strong homosexual orientation from the priesthood. Far from being limited to the Catholic Church, this document sends a strong if disparate social message that there is something inherently wrong—we don't know what, because it doesn't say—with a homosexual orientation that was not morally wrong at the time Cardinal Ratzinger wrote his *Considerations on Homosexuality*. This means that, now, abstaining throughout life from any sexual activity is no longer good enough for someone with a homosexual orientation who aspires to become a priest!

"For heterosexuals, however, their sexual orientation would seem to pose little, if any, problems in fulfilling their vocations. So, naturally, you have to ask yourself if heterosexual priests are eunuchs. Or is it the case that God helps heterosexuals more than homosexuals on chastity issues? Or is it that homosexuals have an inordinate and uncontrollable predisposition toward sexual activity that we don't know about? These, I believe, are valid questions, and the flock of rational and intelligent sheep need an answer from the institution that calls itself Mother and Teacher."

"I believe that one of the Catholic cardinals indicated that excluding those with homosexual orientation is similar to and as proper as preventing someone with vertigo from becoming an astronaut. Do you think the argument is valid?" asked Mr. Edson.

"Well, let's think about that," I said. "One would think that, at the very least, the Church could have come up with a more valid analogy. Anyone who suffers from vertigo would become dizzy up in space, something that could place his or her life in jeopardy, as well as others. There's no doubt about it, it's an exclusionary criterion.

"For the priesthood, however, we were told—only a few years ago—that the requirement called for abstaining from sexual activity, regardless of sexual orientation. So, it shall remain a mystery what the Church knows about homosexuality being much worse than heterosexuality. By suggesting that homosexuality is far more offensive than self-indulging heterosexuality, it appears that the moral goal post has been set back a few yards, but only on one

end of the field.”

“I’m somewhat surprised, sir,” advanced Ms. Williamson, “You seem to be suggesting that religion doesn’t have a duty to defend its values!”

“I guess that I’m surprised by your statement, Ms. Williamson. Not only do I defend religion’s right to stand up for its beliefs; I’m one of those who think that, overall, we’re much better with religion than without it. I’m a man of faith and prayer. But religion is not excluded from an obligation to articulate its positions on firm ground. If you pardon my pun, we can’t simply take a statement like the Cardinal’s at *faith* value.”

After the groaning subsided, I continued, “Do you believe that given what we have heard here this evening, the evidence is so clear, so precise, so evident, one way or another, that both the mental health community and the Opposition can issue ideological statements and then ask citizens to bow to them? I’m sure you believe that as human beings our dignity deserves and requires more from both sides, wouldn’t you say? Is that asking for too much?”

So, you do believe that the Opposition is justified in the stance it takes!” she exclaimed.

“Not necessarily in its particular stance, but in taking a stance,” I answered. “The information presented here tonight places us in a dilemma; it leaves us scientifically confused. And, from a political standpoint, the absence of conclusive scientific evidence—largely because both sides are so divided that they are unwilling, I’d say incapable, of meeting and discussing the issue as scientists—leaves us all in a socially disturbing situation.

“If the cause or causes of homosexuality could be scientifically established, the question of personal choice would be settled, at least scientifically. That would give leaders of the Opposition new information on which to base their ethical decisions. That doesn’t mean that some wouldn’t remain obstinate in their beliefs, but their obstinacy would put them at odds with their ethics.

“To the extent that homosexual behavior is preventable or can be avoided without causing any emotional, physiological, spiritual harm to individuals, as Captain Francis indicated, the Opposition has not only the right but the moral duty to oppose something it regards as immoral or harmful, either on religious or non-religious grounds. We already have established this.

“But, if it can be established, beyond doubt, that homosexual orientation and homosexual activity are not a matter of choice, but instead happen as a result of biological mutation or psychological traumas, or by ignorant parenting, you name it, then socially we have to begin a process of social acceptance, whether the Opposition likes it or not. This would imply having to accept or tolerate people with physical or emotional characteristics we may strongly dislike. Otherwise, what are your options? Are you going to ask them to commit suicide to please our well being? Are we going to ask society to banish them from the public eye so that our inner being may feel more relaxed, less

anxious?"

"I think you're suggesting that this is going to get worse before we reach consensus," judged Mr. Hunt.

"Would you like to answer Mr. Hunt's question, Mr. Dickerson?"

"Yeah. I think this is one heckuva political spaghetti. I mean, you have an ideologically-oriented, quasi-scientific, crusading Opposition on one side being confronted by a similarly arrogant counterpart, the pro-Gay movement.

"True, it appears there are some extraordinary exceptions of academic integrity and objectivity on the part of a few; but overall, I would have to say that politicians, activists, and scientists on both sides of the ideological spectrum are all doing a disservice to the national debate and to the American people. That's what I think."

"Isn't that kind of a harsh statement?" asked Ms. Bynum.

"Ms. Bynum, we have to think about the people being involved in this debate. If we were talking about Joe Blow or your average Susie Q. citizen talking, do you think we would be paying all this attention? No. But our leaders in this debate are society's primary spokespersons and institutions. This is serious! So, yes, this is gonna be one helluva unnecessary battle in the cultural war, and frankly I don't see winners emerging out of this one."

Again, there was stark silence in the room. No one spoke up, each looking lost and adrift of their intellectual bearings.

"Sir?" said Ms. Williamson, hoping that I would provide them with guidance.

"Sometimes when we're at loggerheads with each other, it seems as if we have to resign ourselves to become motionless," I said. "Not so, not so at all. I happen to share Mr. Dickerson's frustration and his disappointment in those who guide or rather have failed to guide this debate.

"And, perhaps, this is happening because they have been debating instead of doing what we are doing here this evening: listening to each other, respecting each other, assuming the other's point of view, unafraid of being persuaded by others. It seems that both sides are suffering a bad case of the Scalia syndrome; *You'll never convince me!*" I shouted. "Remember?"

"Well, if we allow ourselves the opportunity to take a step back and ponder, reflect, think, we may realize that we have gained vital information. Suppose you're a participant in a car rally and the directions you were given are telling you that you'll be at the next mark in twenty minutes. However, after thirty minutes you notice that you're not there yet. Well, what do you do? You stop, study the situation, and if you notice you missed a turn, well, you turn back, right?"

"Becoming lost momentarily forces you to reevaluate your position. But, if you insist on believing that you're right and decide to keep on going, you may end up so far away from your destination that you might even get lost in the process. And, right now, I think that both sides have lost perspective. All

major players including religious leaders and activists, the scientific community, our political leaders owe society more than what they have delivered.

“Otherwise, listen to what we will get. Sometime ago, I received a newsletter in the mail from the Family Research Council requesting my support toward its anti-gay agenda. Even though I’m a strong believer and supporter of family values, I chose not to grant my support to this organization.

“Mind you that I was able to understand, at least, part of its agenda. Upon reading in their newsletter—assuming the content was true—that a district judge in Denver in 2003 had forbidden a mother to educate her child along religious beliefs that homosexuality is morally wrong, I said to myself, ‘how could the courts prevent someone from having their own moral beliefs if the issue hasn’t been resolved scientifically?

“Or the incident in 2004 in Philadelphia in which Christians *were arrested for peacefully sharing Bible verses against homosexuality*.¹⁷ Now, tell me, is it correct to say that an ethical belief is, at all times, necessarily the equivalent of prejudice, particularly since the scientific evidence is lacking?

“Of course, I didn’t think for a second that this issue was one-sided. And sure enough, the newsletter reported, indignantly, that a group of homosexual activists had stormed the headquarters of the Family Research Council, *some dressed as condoms*, to protest the organization’s anti-gay agenda.¹⁸ Although the activist group, in my view, went over the top—you don’t have to be coarse to drive you point across—still, why shouldn’t these activists feel offended by an organization that believes that sharing a lifestyle they didn’t choose is worse than leprosy?”

“That’s great! That’s just great,” remarked Ms. Williamson. “I presume the example vindicates my position in opposing gay marriage.”

“Insofar as the evidence we need to decide conclusively one way or another isn’t in, yes, you are,” I said. “But remember, the other side will also have the right to strongly oppose you on this issue.”

“It’s interesting, Ms. Williamson,” said Captain Francis. “I share your frustration. But prejudice is only half the problem. I for one also realize that the Opposition has legitimate reservations. The problem seems to be that the Opposition is not blind. And neither are millions who have staked out somewhat of a more moderate stance. Their sight is 20/20. They see all too well when two men or two women hold hands, kiss, and dance. The Opposition even has mental x-ray capability that allows it to imagine members of the same sex having intercourse in their bedrooms.

“Then, you have the way in which the entertainment industry portrays homosexuality as sheer hedonism. And some gays and lesbians contribute, through their behavior, to perpetuate that image. The image may not do justice to all gays and lesbians, but the image seems all too real.

"Beyond homophobia, and many gays and lesbians don't understand this, that image affects the inner core of many conservatives and moderates. It destabilizes their set of values and their psyche. The Opposition simply can't handle it. It just cannot handle it.

"So, stopping gay marriage is the Opposition's Maginot line, it's Gettysburg, the last barrier to stem the tide of unacceptable behavior that, should it continue unabated, could bring about a radical change to the social fabric. Maybe, if we were all blind, we would not be having this problem. But we're not, and for many people, to see two men kissing is, to put it mildly, shocking, and to put it not so mildly, well, repugnant, revolting, nauseating, vile, or any other synonym I'm leaving out."

"So, basically what you're suggesting is that, beneath the ethical opposition, we're facing cultural differences that shock us into rejecting those differences," she said.

"Yes, I think it's quite possible," he answered.

"Then, since conclusive studies are not in regarding the issue of choice, I'm being told that I have to accept LGBT behavior," said Ms. Williamson. "Perhaps I don't understand human sexuality. To me, some things are so evident. I mean, I cannot possibly like another woman sexually! I don't understand how that can happen. I can understand what Ms. Vanhurst said that people might seek sex simply for the pleasure it brings, but becoming romantically involved? That goes beyond physicality into emotions. How's that possible?"

"I don't know how to answer that," said the Captain. "And I'm afraid that neither does the scientific community; at least not yet."

"Well, we certainly are allowed to speculate by delving into our own emotions," I remarked. "We can't make generalizations based on our own feelings, but at least we can get an idea. Anyone? Mr. Hunt? Mr. Radusky! You haven't said a word throughout the entire evening. Would you like to give us your view?"

"I don't know if there are easy answers to Ms. Williamson's question," replied Mr. Radusky, "however, it may help if I could ask Captain Francis something, sir."

"Go ahead."

"Very well, Captain, could you tell us whether you would be capable of French-kissing another man."

Immediately, the entire class tensed as it realized that the Captain was growing increasingly uncomfortable. I would have felt the same way, too, above all because I considered the question to be inappropriately personal.

Captain Francis hesitated, and hesitated, and hesitated.

"Uh, frankly . . . I mean . . . you mean if I would be able to derive pleasure out of doing so, correct?"

“Yes, that’s what I meant. How difficult would it be for you?”

“I don’t think I would derive any pleasure out of kissing another man,” replied the captain. “As a matter of fact, I don’t think I could bring myself to do it for the sheer enjoyment of it.”

“Well, sir, that’s how difficult it would be for me to kiss a woman. I wouldn’t get any pleasure out of it,” said Mr. Radusky.

That was an unexpected shocker. I felt like a complete idiot. What could I say at a moment like this? Fortunately for us all, Mr. Radusky spoke up.

“I didn’t mean to make you feel uncomfortable, Captain. It’s not as if I haven’t come out yet. It’s just that, not being an activist, I have felt quite embarrassed throughout the evening. It’s not anyone’s fault. I’m still trying to get used to . . . being different.”

“You don’t have to explain,” I replied. “Your privacy is your right, you know.”

“And so is my right to assert myself, sir. As it has been said here many times, this is not something that I chose. But, let me finish answering your question. I guess one could think that, being a man, I can just kiss a woman for the heck of it. Sure, I can! I’ve seen it done too many times in movies. I have tried it, and that’s how I discovered that I wasn’t experiencing any sensuous feelings, much less any sexual desire. It’s just the way it is.”

“Thank you, Mr. Radusky,” I said. “And I hope that none of us have been disrespectful of you.”

“None of you have been disrespectful in any manner. It’s just that it feels very uncomfortable to listen to all these negative feelings that are said about someone like me. At times, it makes me want to hide; and perhaps, because I realize that I simply can’t hide, in order to confront these uncomfortable moments, including the gay bashing, the only recourse is to overcome them by the sort of I-don’t-give-a-damn-what-they-think attitude that others find so revolting.”

“I appreciate your candor, Mr. Radusky. Okay, anyone else would like to contribute?” I asked.

“I would like to ask you, sir, about your personal views are on this issue,” said Mr. Hunt.

“I thought I had shared my views already, Mr. Hunt. Perhaps, I was not very concrete. But, very well; as an ideal, as a philosophy of life, it’s difficult for me to accept self-indulging homosexuality. I feel the same way, however, toward heterosexual self-indulgence. I don’t think we stand to gain much as human beings in our relationships by treating sex as a self-indulging activity.

“Moreover, the way I see it, we heterosexuals are as different from gays and lesbians, bi-sexuals, and transgenders as they are from us. This means that they

have to accept us, too. And despite the fact that often we ostracize them and reject them, not too many homosexuals hope we burn in hell.

"Many gays and lesbians are ethical, and civil, and kind. They're responsible, and patriotic, and they share all those attributes we hold dear within ourselves.

"Being a believer in God, I think that I have the moral duty to be consistent with my beliefs. If we're told to love thy neighbor, including those who've not wronged us, I don't see how can hate and discriminate those who through no fault of their own, as we're told, are sexually different from me.

"Sexual love, not the self-indulging type, is one of the most powerful drives within us. I happen to believe it is a God-given human attribute, and I would be poorer spiritually, emotionally, and physically if I were not able to experience it. So, how could I possibly deny those same feelings, dreams, sensations, those same desires, to someone who's like me in everything except in one aspect? How can I say to others, 'I want to fulfill myself spiritually, emotionally, and physically through sexual love, but I won't allow you to do so; this type of love is not for you.'"

"Even if it's a sin!" exclaimed Ms. Williamson.

"You mean, even if the act were to be sinful, correct, Ms. Williamson? Do you happen to know the circumstances surrounding the life of the person, by any chance? Perhaps, we may want to ask Mr. Radusky if he considers himself a sinner. As a matter of fact, Ms. Williamson, I think you have just condemned your classmate to eternal damnation.

"I realize that you don't mean to judge others. We do it out of habit. One may disagree with the behavior. Personally, I object to self-indulging homosexuality, Ms. Williamson, as I just indicated, but are we heterosexuals so self-righteous, so blind, or so idiotic that we believe that there's no such thing as self-indulging heterosexual behavior? In which case, why seek to remove the log from the homosexual's eye when ours is just as big! And, again, remember, not all answers are in yet. That's part of the problem with judging one way or another.

"I guess that what I'm trying to say is that, when facing two opposite values, the dislike of homosexuality on the one hand, and my moral duty to accept others without denying them what I'm not ready to deny myself on the other, I choose the latter. In doing so, all I'm seeking is the basis of the Golden Rule, a Christian concept no less: treat others as you would want others to treat you?

"I would suggest that you all trade places with Mr. Radusky tonight, but don't just think about it, feel yourselves being the target; feel yourselves being told that we can't stand the way you are; feel yourselves being asked to disappear from sight and being told to burn in hell. Then, ask yourselves what you think of those who are wishing you such a permanent hot climate and whether you would like to share in their faith."

“I don’t wish anyone to burn in hell, sir,” said Mrs. Williamson.

“I believe you. I know you mean well; you’re a very considerate person who opposes the moral wrongness of the behavior.

“In my case, I view the issue differently. If I were to feel my heterosexuality as intensely as a gay person feels his or her sexual orientation, and someone were to tell me that I am unethical and depraved on account of my behavior and that I would have to alter the way I feel and become homosexual, well, that would be one daunting struggle. It wouldn’t be only a matter of changing my sexual orientation; it would be a matter of changing my personality! My sexual orientation and the sexual behavior that comes with it is so much a part of what I am as a person, that it would take a lobotomy to change me!”

“You don’t suppose that’s an easy thing to do, sir?” she asked.

“Lobotomy? No, actually it’s a rather complicated procedure,” I replied jokingly.

“No sir, I meant the acceptance you spoke of.”

“Oh, I agree, it’s not easy.

“What do we get from our discussion tonight? We may find that it’s imperative for science and religious leaders to find out if members of the LGBT community are truly capable of becoming what is being asked of them without any spiritual, emotional, or physical impairment resulting from the process. Once we know the answers to these issues, we may decide how to proceed next.”

“What if it was demonstrated that acceptance of civil gay marriages or civil unions would further contribute to devaluing the traditional religious and social institution of marriage, would you still favor these unions?” asked Mrs. Williamson.

I paused to ponder on what I thought was a most difficult question. “Obviously, I would not want to do anything that would further devalue the institution of marriage, Ms. Williamson, and I think that religious leaders, social scientists, and politicians who think that marriage is still a valid and necessary institution would be right to oppose anything that lessens it. This means that heterosexuals have to work much harder at rehabilitating and strengthening the institution of marriage through religious and secular values, economic and financial legislation, and through the pulpit, not only the religious pulpit but the political, too.

“At the same time, could we, in good conscience, seek to save the institution of marriage at the expense of the religious, social, and political repression that mandates that homosexuals inhibit, repress feelings that are the product of a sexual orientation in which they had no choice? Can we as Christian, Jewish, Muslim or humanist heterosexuals dictate that homosexuals be forbidden

from realizing their human potential with the cards that either nature or God handed them?

"Should heterosexuals attempt to save ourselves at the expense of condemning those who through no fault of their own exhibit a very different sexual behavior but which in the end seek the same goal as heterosexuals: love and companionship, commitment, fidelity, and of course all the legal rights that married heterosexuals derive from society?"

"What about the threat that a legal redefinition of marriage solely as the union of two persons based on legal and financial rights could adversely affect the traditional concept of marriage, and thus result in devaluing marriage itself even further?" Ms. Williamson persisted.

"But that is what we have today!" I replied. "There is no such thing as value-oriented definition of marriage in our civil society. All there is, is a permit authorizing a male and a female to go through with a festivity in which the female is usually dressed in white and the male in either black, gray or light blue. No legal definition of marriage will tell the couple what it is they are getting into, much less what they have to do to make their union successful."

"What you're saying is that no amount of legal definition stemming from civil society is going to transform the institution of marriage into what's supposed to be according to a Judeo-Christian or Muslim or Hindu or humanist tradition," argued Ms. Bynum.

"That's right. Our civil definitions, our amendments, our referendums, are not meant to strengthen the institution of marriage; these have a defensive—or I should say an offensive—purpose: to inoculate ourselves against homosexuality by leaving gays and lesbians out of two institutions—marriage and family—because, either God or nature didn't favor them enough to make them like us.

"Now, if science, could once and for all, indicate that homosexuals have a choice in their orientation, our task would be less daunting. But forcing homosexuals to condemn themselves to a life that we heterosexuals enjoy for the sole purpose of saving what is vital to many of us is neither a religious nor a humanist sentiment. The scientific, religious, and political task ahead of us is to seek values and policies that validate and consider each human being in accordance with what he or she has been endowed through no fault of their own. We need to strengthen the institutions of marriage and the family, no doubt. But we cannot do so at the expense of those who through no fault of their own—as religious and social institutions acknowledge—happen to have a different sexual orientation while sharing similar spiritual, emotional, and physical needs as heterosexuals.

"Can we truly ask homosexuals to remain celibate under the threat of eternal damnation or continue to stigmatize them as a result of our religious, social, and political values? Can we place upon homosexuals the unfair burden that surely very few heterosexuals can bear? Do homosexuals, by any chance, have a

stronger, more powerful spiritual, emotional, or physical constitution than heterosexuals that would enable them to endure our request?

“I think that how heterosexuals go about in dealing with this issue would say a great deal about who we are as religious and humanist people.

“Now, I propose we call it a night. I’ll see you next week. Have a good evening.”

Endnotes

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