



Motivated by our different religious traditions, we believe that attitudes, priorities, and institutions can be changed to reflect a just and democratic use of the universe's bounty; we believe in the value of work that contributes to the common good; and in the healing influence of respect for the differences as well as the commonness of human experience.

Vol. 29, No. 1, 2005

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Religious Socialism

THE JOURNAL FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH AND SOCIALISM

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE *A Call for Reasoned Moral Debate*

NORM FARAMELLI

I believe that same-sex marriage is morally sound and ultimately good for the social fabric of the nation. That affirmation is, of course, widely contested in the United States today. But before that affirmation can be defended, it is necessary to recognize that the current debate over same-sex marriage is bogged down in deep confusion. The confusion is the result of (1) the politicization of same-sex marriage (with calls for a constitutional amendment) and (2) the mixing up of civil and religious functions and symbols, as if the state were the custodian and guarantor of the sacramental nature of marriage.



1) The highly politicized debate over a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage appeals to fear of gays and lesbians. It is argued that union of gay people poses a real threat to the institution of traditional marriage. This appeal to fears energized some conservative Christians in the last election. The issue was on the ballot in eleven states and increased voter turnout substantially. It proved to be a crucial factor in the election outcome in Ohio and also to the margin of victory of George W. Bush.

2) In the heated debate on same-sex marriage (both on the national and state levels), the role of the church and state get totally mixed up. According to the laws of the state, a marriage is a legal arrangement between two people with all the legal rights and privileges accorded them. Civil marriage is not related to sacraments or religious symbols. In U.S. society, despite the separation of church and state, the church and other religious institutions function as agents of the state and officiate at civil wedding ceremonies. That is one cause of the immense confusion. In other places, such as most countries in Europe, the legal aspects of the ceremony are performed in a civil setting, and the blessing of the marriage (the sacramental component) is offered in the church.

Both of these issues need to be sorted out before we can engage in reasonable dialogue.

Whether the church or any other religious institution grants its blessings to a gay

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It's About Patriarchy, Too

MAXINE PHILLIPS

Many thanks to John Cort, Norm Faramelli, and Andrew Hammer for writing and soliciting pieces for this issue's symposium on same-sex marriage. There was a time when people on the left might have had a symposium on whether marriage itself was worth preserving or whether it was a relic that, come the revolution, would wither away along with the state and money. Now, as Michael Walzer has argued elsewhere, the left-right splits we used to count on have disappeared.



Progressives, who might have been expected to condemn the nuclear family of two adults in a committed relationship as archaic and instead argue for broad social supports to benefit children and a wide variety of family configurations, now defend that most conservative of institutions. Conservatives, who might have been expected to promote marriage, are against it for a significant population even as they decry promiscuity and serial liaisons.

In Europe, the situation is different. Legal same-sex unions, whether known as marriage or as civil unions, as well as common-law rights for cohabiting same-sex couples, exist in several countries of the European Union and several provinces in Canada. At the same time, heterosexual marriage in Europe has declined, even as European Union countries continue to support family-friendly policies. Thus, countries that have family policies far to the left of the United States, such as paid parental leave, widely available affordable day care, and family allowances, have lower rates of marriage.

No surprise there. Progressives have long argued that social benefits should not be tied to marriage. All of the benefits and rights can be legislated for any configuration one wishes. Children can receive benefits directly. Adults may designate health-care power of attorney. Property can be co-owned. Obviously, many people would have to do more advance planning than they do now, but common-law rights could also obtain, as they do in several European countries and did once in this country.

I'm not an anthropologist or social historian, but it does seem as if most of the reasons for marriage in the past, which had to do with maintaining male lines of inheritance, producing children, and cementing alliances, are obsolete. It's true that with few social supports available, it makes some sense for people to join forces economically. In a non-agrarian society, though, the need to produce lots of children is almost nonexistent, as evidenced by a U.S. birthrate that is at less than replacement level. High-tech fertility methods and adoption can bring children to any family configuration.

Is there, in fact, any reason for civil unions or marriage at this point in human history? Well, yes.

I remember a lesbian feminist friend telling me 20 years ago that she saw no reason for gays or lesbians to re-create the norms of a heterosexual society that was failing so miserably to provide equal rights for women and equal opportunities for children. And I remember the joy in her voice a few years ago when she called to ask me to take part in her ceremony of holy union. She was in love, she wanted to make a public commitment, and the fact that the state wouldn't sanction it, while important, wasn't as important as the public witness.

As all of our authors point out, it is that desire, the one for a sacralized or public bond, that is proving so divisive. There may someday be compromises on civil unions that appeal to national ideals of equity and lead to full civil rights. But the religious battles show no signs of abating.

Why is there such fear and loathing on the part of so many people in faith communities? Is it
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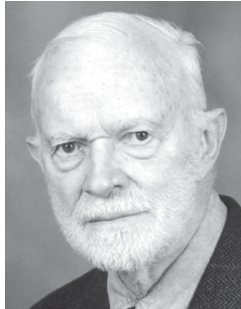
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Same-Sex Marriage

A Response to Norm Faramelli

JOHN C. CORT

Is it simply a case of equal rights, stupid? Or Sodom and Gomorrah, you libertine? These are the more simple reactions that characterize those who line up on one side or the other in the current debate over gay marriage.



Norm Faramelli takes the equal-rights position, but his argument is by no means simple. It is a highly intelligent, civilized, even religious argument. It seems to be indisputable.

He mentions upfront that “the issue was on the ballot in eleven states,” but does not mention the fact that all eleven voted against gay marriage. He does, however, concede that it cost John Kerry the state of Ohio and therefore the presidency, even though Kerry himself did not support gay marriage, but only civil unions.

We can go further than that: the odds are that any politician who ties his candidacy to the tail of the gay marriage kite is fairly certain to lose, unless he is running in one of the bluest of the blue states. Or to put it more strongly: any hope of the Democrats’ recapturing the White House, the other House, and the Senate is dead on arrival for the foreseeable future if the national party ties its hopes to that kite. Is the word “marriage,” as opposed to, say, the words “civil union,” worth that price?

But you might say, “The Democrats tied their hopes to the cause of racial justice, even though it cost them much of the South, and still costs them. You have a better reason than mere political advantage if this is a moral issue like racial justice.” But is it? I would protest that in no way is it a moral issue like racial justice. The weight of morality falls mostly on the other side.

Why did those eleven states vote against gay marriage? Were those votes really comparable to racist votes against justice for blacks? Why, by all the polls, did those votes reflect the opinion of the vast majority of the American people? Are they all so blind, and so deaf, to the reasoned arguments of the Norm Faramellis?

The Religious Argument

Let me cut directly to the religious argument. This is a religious magazine. Norm writes, “On the topic of homosexuality Jesus said nothing that the early church thought worth reporting.” Norm spares us the conclusion to that sentence that we now hear too often, namely, “therefore, Jesus probably did not think

it was a serious sin, as stated by Leviticus and St. Paul—probably not a sin at all.”

This argument is also DOA. Check out Matthew 5:17-19. We know that Jesus himself violated some of the dietary, no-work-on-the-Sabbath rules and regulations of the old law. But these verses make it clear that he was firmly upholding the more basic provisions of that law. He said nothing about active homosexuality because it wasn’t necessary. It was simply unthinkable that any good Jew, which is what he was, would ever question its immorality.

Despite our wild diversity of theological opinion, this is still a predominantly Christian country. Most Christians, like most orthodox Jews and Muslims, regard active homosexuality as seriously sinful.

Several black legislators have supported the similarities of this fight over equal rights for gays to the fight of black people for equal rights. The Black Ministerial Alliance in the Boston area, however, has denied the validity of this argument. Skin color is not a question of choice, they say. Homosexuality is.

This is denied, of course. When gay marriage was debated in the Massachusetts legislature, one of the more moving speakers cited a gay friend who said that to him, “Is it my choice to be beaten, to be laughed at . . .?” Christopher Hitchens likes to point out that one “cannot seriously affirm that men and woman are simultaneously designed to be sick and commanded to be well.”

That now seems to be conventional wisdom, even in some Catholic circles. On the question of choice the psychiatric community is split, although few of the conventionally wise seem to be aware of the split. There is actually a National Association for the Reparative Therapy of Homosexuals (NARTH), headquartered in Encino, California, which has more than one thousand members: psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists, spread over every state of the union and in many other countries. There are large organizations, mainly Protestant in membership, the most notable being Exodus Interna-

“I have to disagree with our Catholic bishops. Civil union seems to be the most practical, and moral, solution to this dilemma that can be legislated in our divided society.”

tional, which consists of ex-gays and ex-lesbians who have become consistently heterosexual by recourse to therapy and, often, religious faith and practice.

Let's Think About Sin

The question of sin enters in. Let's think about sin for a bit. "Grievous matter, sufficient reflection, full consent of the will," said our old Catholic catechism in defining mortal as opposed to venial sin. The current *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which dates from 1994, says much the same thing: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." (Sec. 1857)

The same catechism also says, "A human being must also obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself. Yet it can happen that a moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed" (Sec. 1790)

It seems obvious that most active gays and lesbians, given the constant encouragement from the pundits of conventional wisdom and the relentless barrage from television and other media, have consciences that tell them that their activity is not sinful. Therefore one might conclude that the law should not punish them for acting in accordance with their consciences. But all sorts of things are done in obedience to erroneous conscience. Murderers can murder with a perfectly clear conscience. George W. Bush has been killing with a perfectly clear conscience—in fact, a conscience so clear that he can't stop exulting over its clarity.

Society must sometimes protect its members from the dictates of the erroneous conscience as well as the violated conscience. Active homosexuality is not murder, but there may still be harmful consequences if society gives it another badge of respectability by calling the union of two men or two women "marriage."

The Case of Barney Frank

One of my favorite legislators is Barney Frank, an openly gay member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He sometimes asks a fellow legislator, "How does my sexual behavior hurt you?"

The answer seems obvious, but it is not. It depends on who "you" is. If "you" is a man, or woman who is deeply torn in mind or soul over the question of sexual behavior, the example

of Barney Frank, an attractive, witty progressive, can be just the push that moves him or her into behavior that violates conscience and creates misery.

And there is another question that is worth asking: "Does gay marriage hurt the children raised by gay parents?" It seems obvious—simple common sense—that they will grow up more sympathetic and susceptible to the gay lifestyle than the children of heterosexual parents and therefore, incidentally, more vulnerable to the "beatings and laughter" and the other liabilities, the other miseries that many gay people still suffer in our society.

I have to disagree with our Catholic bishops. Civil union seems to be the most practical, and moral, solution to this dilemma that can be legislated in our divided society. And there is no reason why it cannot provide all the rights that marriage can provide.

What About Polygamy?

What is curious about the whole debate is that nobody, as far as I know, has mentioned the subject of polygamy and its relevance to the problem of gay marriage. The last time I looked, every state in the union had a law declaring polygamy illegal. Now, polygamy is far more attractive, to the average male at least, than gay marriage. You can even find justification for it in the Bible.

You can argue, with much more validity than the argument for homosexuality, that it is a *natural* human relationship. You can even do the Hitchens thing: "Why did God design men to be polygamous and command them to be monogamous? It isn't fair."

There just seems to be something about the conscience of Americans—indeed, of the whole secular Western world—that balks at the idea of polygamy and passes laws to prevent it. So it is with the idea of attaching that ancient word "marriage" to a union that most of us, according to our own consciences, regard as immoral, despite all the hype.

A constitutional amendment, one way or the other, seems unnecessary. But let the state referenda continue. Right now, Norm, the score is 11-0. Unless your team can pull off a Red Sox comeback, it looks like you are not going to the World Series.

And if, despite that, you persuade the Democrats to go down fighting for gay marriage, be prepared for a long, long sojourn in the backwoods of American politics, for a long, long period of Republican domination: preemptive wars, tax cuts for the rich, ever-more painful suffering for the poor, the unemployed, for working people, for the labor movement, for the elderly, for the sick, for environmentalists, on and on and on.

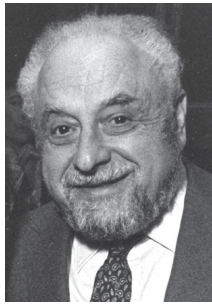
It's your call.

John C. Cort is the author of Christian Socialism and Dreadful Conversions: The Making of a Catholic Socialist.

No Validation

ARNOLD JACOB WOLF

Rabbis don't marry people. I know that's hard to believe, but according to Jewish law it is true, despite what the State of Illinois may think. Jews marry each other in several ways, including by gift, document, sexual intercourse, and/or prenuptial agreement (k'tubah). The rabbi is there only to make sure that everything is kosher, valid, and beyond doubt. I am authorized to certify only Jewish couples of different genders; or, at least, so it seems to me. Sorry!



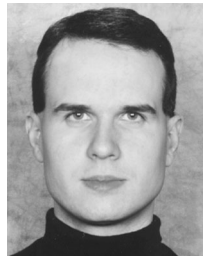
To same-sex couples, then, I say, "You are entitled to anything any other couple has, including the right to marriage. Just don't ask me to validate your union. I have enough trouble with those whose marriages I am now permitted to authorize. I think we are all very confused, not so much about homosexuality as about sexuality as such. We are not doing well with any kind of marriage or any possible alternative to marriage, alas. Not now, anyway.

Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf presides over the Kam Isaiah Israel Congregation in Chicago, Illinois.

Civil Unions for All

ANDREW HAMMER

When my wife and I were married, we signed a piece of paper in a dingy office, received plastic cards to show that we were married, and in a rare show of bureaucratic humor, we were given a tiny bottle of dishwashing liquid as a reminder of some of the more mundane duties that lay ahead for us. Then we went to the temple and really got married.



Before I dig any further into what has become a political hot potato, let me be clear on the question of the political rights of homosexuals. I support the right of my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters to have full legal access to all of the same public services that I do because of my heterosexuality. I support their right to have their unions legally recognized by the state, so that they may be guaranteed equal treatment under the law when it comes to the multitude of life's protocols that heterosexuals take for granted. And I support the right of gay people to worship and take part in the rituals of my faith.

But I am not in favor of the state's either sanctioning *or* banning what is being called gay marriage. My position is not that homosexuals should not be married; *it's that many heterosexuals shouldn't be either.* My argument is not about homosexuality, but centers rather on the separation of church and state. What I'm about to offer here may seem little more than a dance with semantics, but bear with me.

As far as the law is concerned, the first "marriage" I had—symbolized not by the holy symbols of the chuppah and two rings, but by the plastic cards and dishwashing liquid—was all I needed to secure whatever legal rights would accrue to me by virtue of being "married." But the truth is that this was a civil

union, as is any other similar ceremony performed by a secular body or the representative thereof. We needed nothing else to gain the legal entitlements that one receives from such a union.

However, we wanted to be married, and that meant that we needed to find a synagogue to give to us that state of being which the state cannot impart. In the same way that we would not have gone to a Baptist church for a Jewish wedding, we would not go to the state to be married. The state *legally united* my wife and me, it did not *marry* us. The concept of marriage is at its heart a religious one, its terms and catechism defined by each religious faith and denomination. Alternately it is also a tribal one, which is bound by similar rules and traditions. Thus, marriage is by its nature exclusive and therefore not the proper domain of the state, which in a democracy is obliged to be inclusive.

“I am not in favor of the state’s either sanctioning *or* banning what is being called gay marriage. My position is not that homosexuals should not be married; *it’s that many heterosexuals shouldn’t be either.* My argument is not about homosexuality, but centers rather on the separation of church and state.”

Forget sexuality. As I have defined it, *atheists* have neither use for nor right to marriage. What everyone, regardless of faith or sexuality, does have a right to, and must have in order to legally begin life as a couple, is the civil union. The civil union is the actual contract between all those who seek the legal benefits of marriage without wanting to embrace the inherently religious rite of marriage itself. The state calls it marriage, but that is a misnomer, when you consider that those who have a marriage, an act sanctioned by a religious institution, are required to have that act legitimized by the state in order to gain those legal benefits. A civil union is not a marriage, but the state's way of confirming that united couples can begin to enjoy the legal rights granted to them. And the essence of the debate over gay marriage is one of civil and legal rights.

If we look at it this way, we see that if we insist on using the term *marriage* to describe these civil unions, then the state has usurped the role and authority of religious institutions by performing them. Never mind the well-founded concern that religion might encroach upon the state; by seeking to determine what constitutes marriage, the state places itself in a dangerous position whereby it begins to act as an interpreter of religious law. Religious people, especially those who would support the idea of a constitutional amendment on marriage, should be very concerned about that. The state can and should determine to what degree, if any, religious law will be allowed to supersede civil law; what it cannot do is determine what religious law *is*.

The Real Debate on Same-Sex Marriage

So, if we accept that the state has the right to perform nothing more than a civil union for all couples, what about those homosexuals who want to be married by a religious institution?

That's a battle that must be fought within each religious institution. People can indeed raise all kinds of calls and issues within those institutions, but we should remember that religious institutions do not control your health insurance, your tax burden, or your right to be considered the legal guardian or heir in relation to your life partner. I pray that it stays that way.

What religious institutions do control are the terms of their own membership. No matter how discriminatory those terms are deemed to be by progressive-minded people, no group of people who are considered to have violated those terms has the right to insist that the institution change those terms, especially on matters that the owners of that institution believe to be unambiguously decided for all time by their holy scriptures.

Luckily, many progressive-minded people control some religious institutions, and there are options. A gay Jew can find a Reconstructionist congregation that will accept him or her as a member and even as a rabbi. A gay Christian may have a harder search, but there are many congregations where gay and lesbian families are welcomed as equals.

Although those who favor a catholic (in the original sense of the word) solution to the matter will disagree, I believe that

each congregation has to decide how to operate in regard to the question of gay marriage. If people are to have the freedom to love whom they wish, they certainly must be free to think as they wish, associate with whom they wish, and form organizations on that basis, whether or not we agree with the tenets of those organizations or the thinking behind them. That goes for both sides in the debate, inclusive and exclusive.

Marriage is a religious institution, the requirements of which are entwined with the teachings of each religion that performs it. So long as we hold to the notion that everyone has a secular legal right to be married, we are tying what should be an explicit universal guarantee of rights to a condition of exclusivity defined by religious institutions. My gay friends and comrades may be willing to accept such a quasi-theocratic situation. I'm not so sure about it.

The Soviet Union, which was not much of an example to anyone for anything, did get one thing right. Millions of people were given all of the rights and legal benefits of marriage without ever being married. The civil union was the "marriage ceremony" in that most secular of secular states. In the same way, we should leave marriages to religious institutions, and let the state do what it does best; confer legal benefits to those who meet the criteria to receive them, regardless of sexual orientation. And give out dishwashing liquid.

Andrew Hammer is secretary general of the International League of Religious Socialists, a co-editor of *Religious Socialism*, and a member of the Executive Committee of the DSA Religion and Socialism Commission.

SAVE THE DATES

The Young Democratic Socialists Summer conference will take place August 12-14 at a retreat center in Westchester County about an hour outside of New York City. Check the YDS Web site (ydsusa.org) for details.

DSA's National Convention has been scheduled for November 11-13 in Los Angeles. A special conference on Wal-Mart will be held on November 10. Details on the program, housing, and transportation will be posted on a Convention page on the DSA web site.

“People can indeed raise all kinds of calls and issues within those institutions, but we should remember that religious institutions do not control your health insurance, your tax burden, or your right to be considered the legal guardian or heir in relation to your life partner. I pray that it stays that way.”

A Lesbian Family's Story

LESLIE GLEASON

Last night in our modest, slightly cluttered home, two exhausted parents tried to cook dinner, supervise homework, and get a shower-hating nine-year-old boy off to bed, all the while worrying about work, finances, extended families, and the wider world community. Does this sound like your family or the one you grew up in? Well, that's the point. Even though we are an inter-racial, two-female-headed family, our lives are just like the lives of those who would say that we are too different from, or somehow lesser than, a "traditional" family.

We sometimes say that our lives are just like other families' lives . . . just backward! Where many people meet, get married, buy a house, and start having children, we've taken a slightly different path to end up in the same place. When we met in the summer of 1986, Yani was already parenting a young boy, as a guardian, while his mother pursued drug and alcohol treatment. As we grew closer, it made sense for us to all live together, and for four years we had what I felt was an "invisible" family, trying to live quietly, so as not to "rock the boat" too much for others, but not in denial of who we were or of the proud truth that we all cared deeply for each other. Over time, our families grew more and more understanding and supporting of us and our own identity as a family. When our foster son, then a pre-teen, returned to live once more with his biological mother, we thought the pain would never end, so deeply did we miss him, worry about him, and feel betrayed by "the system."

As with many injuries, time does begin to heal, and although it was quite a while before I could envision having a child in our life again, Yani never waived in knowing that her deepest desire was to have another (or more). After our earlier experience, we were afraid to go the foster home/adoption route, so we began thinking about the possibility of having a baby. Fortunately, by this time,

there was a well-established alternative insemination program in place through a Boston-based community health center, so once we made the decision to move forward, the "how" was not an obstacle. Of course, it wasn't easy, either, what with testing, physical exams, temperature-taking, clinical procedures, and the like. There were many months of disappointments before the good news, on Christmas Day, that our precious baby would be a reality.

As any pregnant woman can tell you, by the time your baby's due, you've been examined so many times that you lose much of your previous modesty and sense of privacy.

For us, this openness, and therefore vulnerability, happened on not just a physical level, but emotional and social levels as well. Our unbridled joy and excitement, and my growing belly, needed explanations. It was good practice for the days when our son could actually speak and would gladly, and often, proclaim to total strangers, "I have two Moms!" (This remark usually elicited a quiet, somewhat surprised response of, "Oh!" from whomever he had just shared with and wry smiles from us.)

By the time our son, Degan, was ready to be born, our family, friends, church, and work colleagues were ready to welcome him, and we couldn't wait to meet him. Three months later, on All Saints Day 1995, he was baptized, along with a set of twin girls who also had two moms, with the full support of our church and family. Our employers each had benefit policies that recognized our domestic partnership as equal to that of a married couple, so we enjoyed the benefits of health and life insurance. After we each took our periods of maternity leave, life settled into a familiar routine, but our apartment started to get a bit cramped. Eventually we were able to buy our first home and then to move to

"During this time, our lives, our family, our life together . . . were alternately affirmed and vilified, protected and threatened, lifted up and demonized. Frankly, I'm glad that our son was still too young really to absorb what was going on and being said."



Leslie, Degan, and Yani

a new home in a different community with a stronger school system. With employment changes, though, we lost domestic partnership benefits, so our insurance costs rose. (That would not have been an issue if we were a legally married couple.)

About this time, the same-sex marriage movement in Massachusetts, as part of the broader move toward equality and justice for GLBT-identified (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender-) people, was picking up steam, in the visible efforts surrounding the complex issues, decisions, and processes of the case we now know as “Goodridge” (*Goodridge v. Massachusetts Department of Public Health*) That one word, the chosen family name of two women and their child, represents not just a court case, but the affirmation of the validity and social acceptability of our committed relationships, established through the time-honored traditions of our judicial system—long the battleground where civil rights have been fought for, lost, and won.

As the case wound its way through the courts, and eventually was heard by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, we began to allow ourselves a hope that perhaps, right here in Massachusetts, the slow and steady march toward justice could take a giant step forward. Weeks and months of waiting for the court decision came to a joyous end when the decision was announced. When I called Yani to tell her the good news, the first thing she said was, “So, you wanna get married?”

“Sure!” I said, and that was that...or so we thought! Weeks and months of public wrangling and hand-wringing followed—over the issue, the decision, the ramifications, the political maneuvering, the role of the Massachusetts legislature and electorate, the meaning of marriage, the meaning of church-state separation . . . all played themselves out in the media, in conversations, in churches, in the streets (well, mostly just on Beacon Street, Boston, in front of the State House). During this time, our lives, our family, our life together (not us specifically or individually, but all GLBT-based relationships and families), were alternately affirmed and vilified, protected and threatened,

lifted up and demonized. Frankly, I’m glad that our son was still too young really to absorb what was going on and being said. All he knows is that his extended family, immediate school environment, and parish community support us as a family.

Despite it all, May 17, 2004, arrived. That beautiful sunny day began like any other school morning, with breakfast and backpacks, and after taking our son to school, we headed off to Town Hall. There, at a very gracious and warm Town Clerk’s office, we were greeted by several other couples from our town whom we know and a representative from the local United Church of Christ church. Everyone seemed almost as excited to be part of this moment in history as we all were! A few days later, after the standard waiting period, two of our friends were married by a justice of the peace at Town Hall, and a week later, with a small group of family and friends around us, we had our civil ceremony too. Although this civil ceremony marked the state’s legal recognition of our married status, we consider July 3 (we chose the day in recognition of the fortieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act), the day our civil marriage was blessed by our church, to be our true wedding day. This was the day our marriage received its fullest affirmation in the presence of many family members, friends, and fellow parishioners. (And we had a great party.) It was necessary to do it this way because the Episcopal Church limits its application of Christian Marriage to a man and a woman, and we did not wish to put our parish priest (and by extension our bishops) under fire. This compromise, as difficult to swallow as it may be at the time, is part of the constant movement toward fuller justice, accepted in the faith that the person who takes the next steps will find it a little easier because the way was opened up by those who came before. In the end, it felt as “real” and wonderful as it possibly could have, and now we proudly share in all the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage.

In Massachusetts anyway!

Leslie Gleason is a Vestry member and Warden of St. Luke and St. Margaret Episcopal Church, Allston, Massachusetts. She works for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Same-Sex Marriage/continued from page 1

marriage is not the primary concern in this article. This article focuses on why it makes sense for the state to grant full legal rights and privileges to all couples who want to enter into committed relationships. Although there has been considerable debate over civil unions or marriage, I would argue that gay or lesbian couples cannot experience all of the rights, benefits, and legal protections of marriage unless they are considered on the same legal plane as heterosexual couples. These protections include medical insurance, inheritance rights, social security benefits, and so on. And that is one of the key prob-

lems with civil unions as a substitute for marriage.

Same-Sex Marriage: A Civil Issue

In his book *Gay Marriage*, conservative writer Jonathan Rauch argues (as noted in the subtitle) that the marriage of gays and lesbians is good for gays, good for straights, and good for America. He argues that families need to be strengthened in the United States. Rauch recognizes that the institution of heterosexual marriage is fragile—assaulted by a host of cultural and economic forces. Yet he strongly embraces the tra-

ditions and obligations of marriage. Rauch argues that the institution of marriage, which is necessary for a stable society, gains strength when it is available to all people. He is fearful that in the United States marriage is losing ground to cohabitation and casual relationships and is regarded by many as just another lifestyle choice. Rauch argues that it is essential that there be commitment to serious relationships, and that civic and legal structures support that commitment. Then Rauch shows that gay marriage can result in a “win-win-win” situation for strengthening the bonds that link us together and for remaining true to our national heritage of fairness toward all people.

It is important for us to recognize that gay marriage (or the possibility of gay marriage) is not the reason that heterosexual marriages encounter difficulty. That fear needs to be put aside. Traditional marriages are failing because of many factors, partly because in industrial societies the participants have more options than in previous periods in our history. Most important, traditional marriage is often treated as a time-limited contract with an expiration date when things do not work out as expected. The lack of permanent commitment (sometimes accompanied by lack of fidelity) and not gays and lesbians is a major factor in undercutting the institution of traditional marriage.

In marriage one enters into a permanent commitment with a partner. Being faithful to that partner is an essential part of the commitment and contributes to successful relationships. The denial of marriage opportunities to gays and lesbians makes it difficult for them to engage in long-term relationships. That denial can also aid and abet promiscuous behavior. Of course, there are many gays and lesbians now living in committed and faithful relationships. These are the people who most desire marriage and should be given full legal underpinnings for that relationship.

There are many purposes to marriage, and procreation is only one of them. But in addition to procreation, there is the rearing of children. Increasingly, gay and lesbian couples are rearing children, and as parents they deserve all of the legal rights and privileges afforded to parents. The fear that gay and lesbian marriages will weaken the institution of traditional marriage is dead wrong. Committed, loving, and faithful relationships are the essence of what constitutes a successful family. And the building of more committed and faithful relationships will ultimately strengthen the institution of all marriages.

Throughout history the family has taken many forms—the tribal family, extended family, the nuclear family, and so on. Thus, we now need to expand our definition of family to include same-sex couples and their children. It is a denial of basic human rights if the same legal protections are not afforded to all families.

Same-Sex Marriage: A Religious Issue

Let me now address some of the religious aspects. As noted, I see the advantages of dividing marriage into two components—

the legal arrangement (which is a state function) and the blessing of the relationship (which is the sacramental function of the religious institution). I would further argue that the church should bless the same-sex relationships as the participants knowingly enter into a committed and faithful relationship. That is my view, however, and although shared by many in our Episcopal Church, it is by no means shared by all. I realize that many religious institutions do not see same-sex relationships in the same way. Therefore, each religious institution should be able to exercise its right to bless or not bless the relationship, and also whether to officiate at the wedding ceremony. That is not the business of the state. Life cannot be neatly compartmentalized, and legal and religious understandings are not totally independent. Nevertheless, it is necessary at this time that the sacramental nature of marriage be understood separately from the legal definitions of marriage.

“There are about a half dozen references to homosexuality in Scriptures and about 1,400-plus references to establishing justice, correcting oppression, caring for the needy, loving our neighbor, and even loving our enemies.”

Why do I think a strong moral case can be made on behalf of same-sex marriage? I argue on the basis of the Bible and on natural law. The biblical arguments against homosexual relations simply do not withstand modern scrutiny. It is curious to me to see a selective fundamentalism at work in many of our religious institutions. For instance, on the topic of homosexuality, Jesus said nothing that the early church thought worth reporting. Jesus did, however, speak clearly against divorce and adultery, neither of which seems to bother us too much today. Moreover, Jesus spoke repeatedly about the spiritual dangers of accumulating wealth, but those teachings are totally disregarded, as many Christians have blessed the tax cuts for the wealthy in the name of economic progress and even economic fairness. There are about a half dozen references to homosexuality in Scriptures and about 1,400-plus references to establishing justice, correcting oppression, caring for the needy, loving our neighbor, and even loving our enemies. Somehow, though, these manifold references have not captured the imagination of the religious institutions. We are so mired in issues of sex that we do not see clearly, nor do we understand the Bible in its totality.

I also argue that all people are made in God’s image, and as a result possess an inherent human dignity that we as religious people need to honor—a dignity that is independent of one’s abilities or one’s contributions to society. There are, of course, subtle distinctions between same and equal. And although same-sex couples are different from heterosexual couples, to treat them differently under our legal system is to relegate one

group to the status of second-class citizens. Although homosexuals and heterosexuals cannot identify with each others' experiences, they can accept each other as children of God made in the divine image.

The arguments against homosexuality rooted in natural law also fail to withstand scrutiny. If homosexuality is a clear deviation from the natural order, then it is difficult to explain the "biological exuberance" manifested in the various types of sexual experiences found throughout the animal kingdom. And among humans, we find that there is some genetic basis to homosexual orientation and behavior.

Conclusion

Gay marriage must be considered in a legal context where the rights and benefits of marriage are available to all couples, and with each religious institution making its own determination as to how it will treat the marriage of gays and lesbians. I have stated my views, but I recognize there are serious differences throughout the religious community. It is necessary, however, that all members of the religious community

- recognize that traditional marriages are not being attacked or weakened by gay and lesbian marriages
- offer support of public policies that will reward commitment and fidelity
- entertain new understandings of what constitutes a family in the twenty-first century
- affirm that all married people are entitled to the same legal protections and benefits

Only after these issues have been addressed can the religious communities decide how to deal with the blessing of same-sex relationships.

Let me close as I began. We need an appeal to reason and moral sensitivity and not to fear. The debate


over same-sex marriage needs to be rescued from the arena of raw politics and the confused roles of the state and religion.

First, with regard to raw politics, the furor over a constitutional amendment designed to exclude (not include) will re-enter the political arena whenever the politicians find it convenient to do so. We must challenge that. Second, the debate over gay marriage in our legislatures has nothing to do with the sacramental nature of marriage. That is not the business of the state. It is the business of the state to guarantee that all people are treated fairly.

In a word, the acceptance of committed same-sex relationships (as expressed in marriage) is a matter of social justice. It is morally sound, and it is good for the social fabric of the community and the nation.

Norm Faramelli is an Episcopal minister, a contributing editor of Religious Socialism, and a member of the Religion and Socialism Executive Committee.

“In a word, the acceptance of committed same-sex relationships (as expressed in marriage) is a matter of social justice.”



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On the Future of the Labor Movement

HERMAN BENSON

For at least ten years there has been an intensive soul-searching discussion—sometimes a bitter faction battle—among labor leaders and rank-and-file activists over the fate of our labor movement. It was provoked by the continued decline in union membership from a high point of more than 30 percent of the nation's workforce to a low point of about 13 percent, even more dangerously low when government employee unionists are omitted from the computations. Simultaneously, as both cause and effect of labor's decline, came a persistent rightward shift in American politics, together with a globalization of the economy, creating an environment ever more hostile to union organizing.



By 1995, top labor leaders were shaken out of complacency. A coalition of big service employee, public employee, and industrial unions, backed by Ron Carey, then the new reform leader of the Teamsters, led an extraordinary insurgent revolt against the top leadership of the AFL-CIO. At the AFL-CIO convention that year, Lane Kirkland, former president, and Tom Donahue, his secretary-treasurer, were forced out and new leaders, headed by John Sweeney as president and Rich Trumka as secretary treasurer, took over. At the time, Trumka was president of the United Mine Workers; his accession to that post had been made possible by the reform victory of the insurgent Miners for Democracy back in 1972.

Rallying to a Noble Cause

Sweeney called for transforming the labor movement into a powerful force for social justice in America. The labor movement, he warned, must grow or die. He proposed a beefed-up campaign to organize the unorganized and an intensified labor political action program.

The message never succeeded in inspiring the union ranks. But it did evoke an enthusiastic response from staff cadres and delegates at the 1995 convention. And from liberal and radical intellectuals came massive expressions of support, reminiscent of the 1930s. A roster of prominent writers and academics pledged renewed cooperation. They formed a new organization to institutionalize their support: Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice (affectionately shortened by friends to Sausage). Several thousands flocked to pro-labor "teach-ins" at various universities. Students enrolled as interns in union summer programs. There was a new spirit. Labor seemed to be showing the way.

Time passes. After ten years, nothing much has changed. The

decline in the overall level of union membership continues, despite occasional successes here and there. Practical reality falls short of stirring rhetoric. According to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics report, the decline has continued, leaving fewer than 9 percent of employees in the private sector represented by unions.

Some time in 2004, a coalition of five major unions, later reduced to four by merger, set out to do unto Sweeney what he had done to Kirkland in 1995. Just as Sweeney had deposed Kirkland in the name of saving the labor movement, the new insurgent group sought to force out Sweeney. Labeling themselves the New Unity Partnership, they insisted that by drastically reorganizing the AFL-CIO into an authoritarian, centralized structure and devoting huge resources to organizing, they could reverse labor's decline. They were able to reanimate the discussion of 1995; they managed to impress the media: the *New York Times Magazine* ran an effusive laudatory boost for one of their leaders, Service Employees president Andy Stern. But the NUP failed to rekindle the enthusiasm inspired by Sweeney in 1995.. Where he had called for transforming the labor movement as a force for social justice, they emphasized mergers, union density, and labor's market share. It came out almost like the voice of corporate consolidation. If the Sweeney insurgency expressed hope, the Stern movement arose out of frustration.

And so when five hundred labor leaders, union staffers, and pro-labor intellectuals from academia came to Queens College in December of 2004 to discuss the NUP program, the mood was sober.

They came not to celebrate but to argue over what to do. There was no consensus, no confidence that a solution was in sight. In the months that followed, it was obvious that the NUP could not win wide support in the AFL-CIO. At first the NUP hinted that it might lead a split from the AFL-CIO. By September of 2004 it voted to dissolve.

The NUP was an odd coupling. There was

“Time passes. After ten years, nothing much has changed. The decline in the overall level of union membership continues, despite occasional successes here and there. Practical reality falls short of stirring rhetoric.”

Douglas McCarron, president of the Carpenters Union, which he had already led out of the AFL-CIO. He had completed the total bureaucratic reorganization of his union in the NUP spirit, almost in parody. All local unions, combined into sprawling regional councils, had been deprived of any autonomous power in collective bargaining. Each council was put under the sway of an executive secretary treasurer, with powers so arbitrary that no one could hold any paid staff position at any level without his or her approval.

Then there were Terrence O'Sullivan, Laborers president, and John Wilhelm, president of the Hotel workers union. Both have a reputation as a new kind of younger progressive labor leader; they apparently surround themselves with young idealistic staffers. Both come out of unions that had been on the federal government's list of unions most dangerously infiltrated by organized crime. They rose from within the old union hierarchy and reached the top spot, not by any insurgency, but only after federal government oversight had forced out their suspect predecessors. Their intentions, as individuals, are surely honorable; but it is hard to envisage their unions as the base for a fresh, new, inspiring labor movement.

Bruce Raynor, then president of UNITE, is another widely praised progressive. His union, having virtually ceased to exist as an effective union of clothing workers, merged with the Hotel union. There was Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, a union with over a million members. Stern was the leading figure in the NUP, its most aggressive and forthright spokesman.

Precisely the Wrong Direction

This combination seemed unlikely to lead the AFL-CIO in the

“To change the balance of political power in America, a change so necessary to restoring union economic power, the labor movement would have to present itself as a people’s movement and rely upon the moral force of its multi-million membership speaking on its behalf in the area of public debate. For that it must democratize. The NUP, which disparaged union democracy and would have bureaucratized the AFL-CIO even further, pointed precisely in the wrong direction.”

quest for the fountain of lost power. To change the balance of political power in America, a change so necessary to restoring union economic power, the labor movement would have to present itself as a people’s movement and rely upon the moral force of its multi-million membership speaking on its behalf in the area of public debate. For that it must democratize. The NUP, which disparaged union democracy and would have bureaucratized the AFL-CIO even further, pointed precisely in the wrong direction.

Now that the NUP has dissolved, its grand design has disintegrated into a wrangle. At the AFL-CIO Council meeting in March, Stern demanded that the AFL-CIO per capita tax be cut by 50 percent so that affiliates could use the money for organizing. Here, Stern has won the support of other unions, including the Teamsters. Who doesn’t like a tax cut? But Sweeney and the AFL-CIO Executive Council offer only 17 percent. Stern threatens again to quit the AFL-CIO if he doesn’t get his way.

Meanwhile, the Carpenters Union, once a key player in the movement to save the labor movement, has vanished from the screen ...forgotten. Because he has embraced the cause of cutting per capita taxes, Jimmy Hoffa, Teamsters president, whose union is still under federal supervision on charges of racket infiltration, is being touted as a spokesman for reform. From the sublime to a squabble over a difference of 33 percent in taxes.

Herman Benson is the founder of the Association for Union Democracy and editor of Union Democracy Review.

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LETTERS

To the Editors:

The postscript on your renewal and fund-raising letter for *Religious Socialism* made me laugh out loud as I read it, so I had no choice but to buy a money order on the spot and send it to you by return mail. Thank you for the work you do, and for the copy of *Christian Socialism* you mailed me when I first subscribed a year ago.

In the past year, I have been reflecting on Christian socialism and where I stand. Shortly before Thanksgiving, I stayed up late, and when the house was quiet, I wrote down what I believe and how I got here. I enclose a copy for you.

In my heart, I have been a socialist for years. But I never acted on it overtly, because in the United States it meant being marginalized in politics. I have been a Democrat all this time, even serving for a year as the executive director of the Democratic Party in Vermont during the mid-eighties. But only recently did it come to me that I had phrased my hesitancy about being a socialist in this country incorrectly. Being a socialist doesn't mean being marginalized. It means working on the margins. That is something else. Sometimes that is where we must stand.

I joined DSA shortly after the 2004 election. [Since originally sending this letter, I have also joined the Socialist Party USA.] Uppermost in my mind, however, is that I was led to this place not by war or by economics or by George W. Bush, but by faith, and that means I have to step up and embrace this—at age 55, I might add.

In solidarity,
Richard A. Waite
Pittsfield, Maine

ED. NOTE: We print a shortened version of Richard Waite's "Why I Am a Christian Socialist" on p. 14 in this issue.

To the Editors:

I've been meaning to write to you about John Cort's abortion article (Fall 2004). Nice job as usual. What was so unusual as to provoke a letter was the other side's response. Basically, "Thank you, John, but no." John presents a moderate position, and [Bebe Anderson] answers with an absolute no. John might as well have said, "Death to all abortionists" for all the difference it would have made.

[Anderson] did make an argument for her absolute position, but it was a bad one. If someone predicts they will have mental distress, they have the right to opt out of a commitment. I need the absolute right to terminate the pregnancy because I may have mental distress. If mental distress gave everyone the right to leave any commitment, none of us would be here. Every kid that was ever raised was raised in spite of great mental distress. If we follow her argument, the future of the family goes away.

Has John ever thought of becoming a Republican? Then he could argue all day in favor of socialism with people who wouldn't have it on pain of death; a refreshing switch from arguing for abortion limits with people who would rather die than moderate their liberal positions. I just heard of Democrats for Life: the pro-life voice within the Democratic Party. We could start Republicans for Socialism.

Harry James
Somerville, N.J.

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WITNESS

Why I am a Christian Socialist

RICHARD A. WAITE

I am challenged by the recognition of Christ in all people (Matthew 25:31-40):

³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?' ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?' ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"



I am inspired by Eugene V. Debs's words to the court upon his conviction in 1918 for violating the Sedition Act. "Your Honor, years ago I recognized my kinship with all living things, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest of the earth. I said then, I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

I believe that work is essential as service to God, service to community, and fulfillment of self. Unemployment and underemployment not only deny people their livelihood but also prevent them from sharing the unique gifts with which they have been blessed. Denying the sacredness of labor and treating it as a commodity is sinful.

I believe that the great wage disparity between those at the top of the wage-salary pyramid and those at the bottom, and between men and women, is unconscionable. Capitalism forces labor and management into hostile camps and makes workers see each other as rivals rather than allies. Socialism breaks down barriers between people.

I believe that other distinctions we make about people based on race, intelligence, social class, sexual orientation, and physical abilities and appearance also deny the oneness of human-

kind and are sinful.

I believe that a people must collectively own the vital industries, sources of energy and raw materials, and transportation networks necessary for its welfare. Worked by labor, these are the bedrock of the economic health of the country and cannot be controlled by the few with a desire to profit.

I believe that no one should be forced into homelessness or go hungry or suffer from cold or be denied access to health care or fail to get an education for lack of money. I look for the fulfillment of Franklin D. Roosevelt's vision of "freedom from want."

I believe that small, locally owned and supported businesses rather than national or supranational chains best provide choice, variety, individuality, service, and pride in a job well done. These businesses also contribute to healthier neighborhoods. Bargain prices bring bargain wages. Economy of scale can overtake quality of life.

I believe that our people and society are morally and physically impoverished by war and preparations for war. America's vast military power has turned us into a rogue state whose reach is so vast we would vigorously oppose it if it were held by any other nation. This situation repudiates the gospel. As Walter Wink wrote in *Engaging the Powers*, ". . . it was Jesus who revealed to the world, for the first time since the rise of conquest-states, God's domination-free order of nonviolent love." Underlying war and war preparations is fear, and underlying that is scarcity, and that is a capitalist notion that is sinful. The gospel's view of the world as bountiful and socialism's recognition that all people are entitled to a share of that bounty deny the culture of scarcity.

I believe our consuming for consumption's sake is in defiance of Christ's teaching in Matthew 6:19-21:

“Underlying war and war preparations is fear, and underlying that is scarcity, and that is a capitalist notion that is sinful. The gospel’s view of the world as bountiful and socialism’s recognition that all people are entitled to a share of that bounty deny the culture of scarcity.”

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal; ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Conspicuous consumption and the celebrity culture that helps fuel it are idolatrous.

I believe that the promise Abraham Lincoln spoke of in his Gettysburg Address is in jeopardy—how "our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal . . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the *people*, by the *people*, for the *people*, shall not perish from the earth." As Walter Wink wrote, "There is a divine vocation for the United States (and every other nation) to perform in human affairs. But it can perform that task, paradoxically, only by abandoning its messianic zeal and accepting a more limited role within the family of nations."

I believe Gene Debs was right when he said, "The issue is Socialism versus Capitalism. I am for Socialism because I am for humanity. We have been cursed with the reign of gold long enough. Money constitutes no proper basis of civilization. The time has come to regenerate society—we are on the eve of a universal change."

I believe that theologian Walter Rauschenbusch was correct when he wrote in 1918, the same year Debs gave his reply to the court, "We have a social gospel." And later, "It constitutes the moral power in the propaganda of Socialism." Rauschenbusch earlier wrote, "Theology must become christocentric; political economy must become anthropocentric. Man is Christianized when he puts God before self; political economy will be Christianized when it puts man before wealth." The gospel shows us how to live. Socialism puts the tools into our collective hands.

Richard Waite is a former executive director of the Democratic Party of Vermont.

Patriarchy/*continued from page 2*

because homosexuality is a sin, as John Cort argues? Or is it because of a deep fear of what lowering that barrier would mean to all the social arrangements that currently prop up patriarchy?

The struggle for same-sex marriage grabs the headlines, but other headlines—of church trials of gay clergy, of defrocking, disfellowshipping of congregations that accept openly gay members—point to a larger picture of which marriage is one part. Once the rhetoric is stripped away, what we see in the anti-gay campaigns is a deep fear triggered by the advances of women's rights.

We can compare the dire predictions of what would happen if women were ordained with the same predictions about ordained gay clergy. We can remember the days of all-male boards that wanted to hold on to their power and let the women's sewing circle or Bible study group serve cookies and coffee.

The fear of change may be so strong that the differences will be irreconcilable. Churches may split as they did over slavery, the abolition of which also threatened longstanding power relationships. Let's remember that after promising starts by the founders of the major Western religions, it has taken thousands of years for women to make the gains that they have. Let's hope that ongoing progress for women and gains for our LGBT sisters and brothers won't continue to be measured in millennia.

* * *

Elsewhere in this issue, Richard Waite says that he realized that being a Christian socialist didn't mean living a marginalized life. It does mean living on the margins. One thinks of biblical metaphors having to do with wandering in the wilderness, of the journey as home. The wilderness is particularly bleak for the labor movement in this period, as Herman Benson reminds us. There may be no clear path out at the moment, but always, on the margins, there is experimentation, new thinking, and scouting parties looking for the way.

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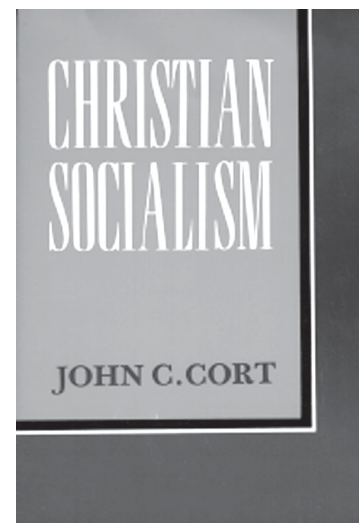
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