

Opinion Comment

Homosexuals And The Jews

"There are more homosexuals in San Francisco than there are Jews."



Re: ab

That is a rather facile way of dramatizing the size of the gay community. But it should not obscure the fact that there are many Jewish homosexuals. One of them, a young man, sought out the official Jewish community last week and warned that the Jewish community had too long ignored the problem. To begin with, he was suggesting that Jewish parents were unprepared to deal with the phenomenon as it appeared, increasingly, among their children. And, consequently, it was more difficult for the young people to deal with themselves.

So far, that might seem to put homosexuality in a familiar "mental health" context. One could see programs of counseling, treatment and education by the agencies of the Jewish community, all designed to correct or ameliorate the destructive effects of this deviant behavior.

But that's not what the young man meant at all. Instead of a "mental health" approach, he proposed a "life style" approach. Homosexuality was not to be considered a disability of any kind, but rather a legitimate, "alternate life style".

There's a world of difference between these two approaches. It is one thing, for example, to talk about civil rights for homosexuals. This past month, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance prohibiting employment discrimination against any individual on grounds of his or her sexual orientation. Of course. But it's quite another matter for society to say that homosexuality is a socially acceptable alternate life style.

The young man put his finger on it. "The traditional idea of the family must now be brought into question," he said. When we begin to talk about homosexuality as an alternate life style, we are no longer talking about personal morality, or about the individual's right to engage privately in deviant behavior - we are talking, at the least, about the social role of the family.

Perhaps more than that. Homosexuality, as a concept is by its nature antithetical to the idea of children, to the idea of continuity, and finally to the concern about future generations. But a society is a social invention one of whose very purposes is to be concerned about continuity and future generations. Under those circumstances - while a civilized society can be humane towards homosexuals, can it be neutral on the subject of homosexuality? Is sexual orientation really a matter of indifference to human society?

In pointing out that the late Romans and Greeks practised homosexuality "on a grand scale," Norman F. Cantor, Professor of History at Brandeis University adds that "it is worth noting that in two other societies that exhibited quite rapid declines, the medieval Arabic and the twentieth century English, homosexuality flourished in the ruling elite." Whether as cause or symptom, a narcissistic lack of concern with the future generations of humanity may be the link between homosexuality as an "alternate life style", and the decline of certain civilizations. See fashionable Berlin of the 1930's.

Maybe such an image draws the bow too tight. But the dilemma is there. Last week, the Board of Rabbis of Northern California voted to support the legalization of any private sexual act between consenting adults, including those now forbidden by law. They were following similar action by the Commission on Social Justice of the Catholic Archdiocese, and others. Seen from one angle, they were voting to remove hypocrisy from the statute books, and to decriminalize private "victimless" behavior. From another angle, they were voting to weaken society's formally expressed bias against homosexuality as an alternate life style.

There are other current examples: Should society legalize homosexual marriages? Should society invite homosexuals into the schools to expound on their philosophy? At what point do we cross the line—from supporting individual rights—to bestowing society's official approval to homosexuality as an alternate life style?

sl
e
r
r
5/26/72
Vol. 127 #21