

“More Than a Legal Issue”, *Christianity Today*, July/August, 2012. “The Party Line: No Such Thing as an Ex-gay” by Eric Metaxas, [Breakpoint.org](http://Breakpoint.org), June 6, 2012.

Over the years my correspondence from CT editors has ranged from bizarre, intrusively personal, even prurient, through gracious and fully supportive. Here, editors who enjoy the right to be married assume that, had they, as kids, discovered their orientation to be homosexual they’d have lived the lifelong celibacy they’re demanding of homosexuals. “We believe gays and lesbians should not be denied fundamental rights granted to every other American.” But their effort to deny marriage for same-sex couples *does* deny a fundamental right granted to *themselves* and *all heterosexual* Americans. Unwillingness to “weep with those who weep” alone and rejoice with those who rejoice” in a cherished same-sex partner, is pathetic. For CT to say something’s wrong by “divine laws” is CT’s right; to try to *legislate* from a *religious* opinion onto all other Americans would be like Muslims trying to impose Sharia on all Americans. And we *are* dealing with “more than a legal issue”; we’re dealing with the Golden Rule!

CT’s Web-only version has Michael Horton insisting he’s not “simplistic” in claiming that the Bible is “straightforward and unambiguous” on gays. Yet, many who agree with his disapproval admit that the biblical data aren’t that *simple*. And other *evangelical* scholars argue that *our* same-sex issues cannot be projected into ancient texts.

Say the editors: “The future of marriage [isn’t dependent on] how we as a nation decide the gay marriage debate” while no-fault divorce “has destabilized marriage like no other”. Even CT has softened a hard line against divorce. Heterosexual marriages are in decline, cohabitation is on the rise, impoverished baby mamas are left to rear kids alone after being abandoned by impregnators, and through all these crises, evangelicals are best known as *antigay* activists crusading against *marriage* for same-sex couples.

Miscasting “traditional marriage”, CT grants: “Far more than the protection of the legal definition of marriage, our society needs a fresh understanding of marriage.” But, CT’s “fresh” is *selfish*. Christians are urged “to shore up marriage in our churches.” But, how about some *historical perspective*? “Traditional marriage” advocates overlook what’s *actually* been *traditional*. What about marriage traditions in Bible days, e.g., “open” marriage with multiple wives and concubines, all of whom were the husband’s property, or, in Deuteronomy, forced marriage of a POW, sexy spoil of war, or forcing a raped virgin to marry her rapist, or *levirate* marriage, mandating a widow’s marrying her dead husband’s brother? And, don’t forget death for adultery. What of “traditional marriage” in Jesus’ day – *arranged* for 12 and 13-year-olds? Evangelical scholar Ben Witherington III states: “At their essence they were property transactions meant to secure the future of one family through an alliance with another ... arranged by the two male heads of the families.” He adds: “There was no dating or romance or courtship in the modern sense.” What of *tradition’s* forbidding marriage for slaves and the *tradition* against *mixed-race* marriage on into America’s mid-20<sup>th</sup> century? Among the last to support *interracial* marriage were evangelicals. What about intra-evangelical debate over complementarian and egalitarian marriages? What fantasy do traditionalists have in mind? The 1950s? *Whose* 1950s?

In CT’s 50<sup>th</sup> year, 2006, the editors drew up a list of “The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals”. Of this task, historian Mark Noll rightly noted, “it is so hard to figure out who ‘we’ are.”

Still, CT rated Rosalind Rinker as their *No. 1 author*. She keynoted EC’s first western (1980) and third eastern (1982) summer conferences and wrote me to say, “Jesus was there, too.” Others on that CT list were also EC keynoters: Charlie Shedd, Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni. Among EC’s other supporters over the years: Bob Rayburn, Eugenia Price, Marten Woudstra, Phyllis Hart, Lew Smedes, Paul Jewett, Harry Boer, Nick Wolterstorff, Kay Lindskoog, Reta Halteman Finger, Walt Hearn, Bob Wennberg, Randy Balmer, Fisher Humphreys, John F. Alexander, Cynthia Clawson, Ken Medema, Jack Rogers, Chuck Smith, Jr. and many more. It remains to be seen whether those who claim the high ground of a supposedly settled antigay orthodoxy will join with our pioneers or will keep following those who, in previous debates, rallied and railed against the marginalized of their day. But, the long, up-hill road of an ever-maturing awareness of God’s scandalous grace and peace is promising.

A CT reader responds: “I seem to meet more and more young adults in my work, at church (where my husband and I lead the college ministry) and in my own family, who experience same sex attraction. These are sincere believers, still in their teens, some of whom have been celibate so far, but who realistically aren’t sure they’re ready to ‘sign up’ for lifelong celibacy, and honestly don’t see a compelling reason that they should.” She quotes Darrel Falk from CT’s cover story on creation and evolution. Falk is wise: “We must be patient with each other and allow each other to follow truth as we see it in Scripture. We must recognize that we will never reach the point where we all see Scripture the same way.” Time was, when side-by-side arguments for creationism and theistic evolution were verboten. They’re still verboten on same-sex issues. But times are changing. In 2011, the Public Religion Research Institute found that 44 percent of 18 to 29-year-old evangelicals are in favor of same-sex marriage.

Eric Metaxas did fine bios of Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer. But in today’s culture war, he slips into a smirk of incompetence. As Breakpoint’s replacement for the late Chuck Colson, he wastes no time in mounting Colson’s old antigay hobbyhorse and riding it with a gusto of bad data and faulty reasoning. He looks to a friend, Bible Code promoter and Jungian, Jeffrey Satinover, who claims homosexuality is “soul sickness” and pushes “reparative therapy”, assessed as ineffective and harmful by mainstream psychiatry and psychology and by the former leaders of the “reparative” and “ex-gay” movements. (On my review of Marvin Olasky’s interview of Satinover, Cf. *Review*, Spring 2005.)

In refusing to accept the evidence *against* “change”, Metaxas spins what he calls a “study” that *wasn’t* a study at all. It was atheist psychiatrist Robert Spitzer’s sharing of informal conversations he’d had with some self-styled “ex-gays”. (NB: “Ex-gay” theology demands a *claim* of “healing” to get “healed”.) Spitzer disavowed the misuse of these conversations but Metaxas conveniently dismisses that as a bowing to “party line”.

