

## LETTERS

### OVERSTATED DICHOTOMY

Wendy Doniger's review of John Boswell's "Same Sex Unions in Premodern Europe" (July 31) captures the arguments and even the feel of the book. But she overstates a small part that goes to the core of Boswell's case. She says: "For the early church created a violent dichotomy between heterosexual marriage, in which sexuality was tolerated for the sake of children, and the priesthood, in which asceticism was idealized and sexuality entirely rejected."

In fact, first millennium Christianity did not make such a "violent dichotomy" between sex and church, and that is one of Boswell's most important lines of evidence for same-sex unions. While early Christian thinkers considered celibacy and abstinence the highest state of spiritual devotion not only for those who practiced asceticism but for people getting married, in actual practice, early Christianity was ambivalent, contradictory and unsettled about sex and relationships throughout the first millennium.

• Local priests were allowed to marry. Not until the second half of the millennium, were bishops not allowed to marry.

• Marriage was considered a state function. The Christian "blessing" of even a heterosexual marriage was not performed regularly but done as a favor.

• In this context, the Church performed "blessings" on any number of relationships: marriage, same-sex relationships, households, business partnerships, adoptions, etc.

• Priests, however, were forbidden to have same-sex relationships "blessed" (an indication that same-sex blessings may have involved sexual relationships).

Boswell argues that in a context

of such sexual pluralism within Christianity and the culture at large, same-sex unions appear plausible. The "violent dichotomy" between the Church and sexuality occurred in the second millennium when Christianity institutionalized heterosexual marriage as a sacrament, prohibited sexuality among clergy, marginalized blessing ceremonies and campaigned against women and homosexuality.

JAMES CONN  
Minister  
SANTA MONICA

John Boswell's consistent use of the terms *Christian* and *Christianity* where he really means *Catholic* or *religious* is misleading. It is a documented fact that the origins of the Catholic faith include the incorporation of rituals and practices common to the pagan religions of the time. This would explain why Boswell's research discovered what seemed to be acceptance of homosexual relationships and the encouragement of chastity within marriage. Both behaviors find their roots in pagan worship and neither can be supported by Scripture. The Bible is very clear in placing sexuality within the confines of a heterosexual marriage. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually impure" (Hebrews 13:4 NIV). Serious study into early church history will reveal that a body of true Christians existed in the shadow of the Catholic church whose activities were characterized by a close adherence to undefiled Biblical teachings. Boswell's "Christians" were most likely not true Christians by definition, since they obviously did not understand nor follow the teachings of the New Testament.

CATHERINE KNAB  
LANCASTER

### ALIEN NATION

Susan Dewan's review of "Abduction" by John Mack accepts the notions that so-called "UFO abductees" bring back wisdom from kindly aliens, concerned for Earth's welfare. She says this near-universal message is "much more important than the endless debate over whether UFOs are real. . . ."

Alas, no "abductee" has ever announced any news that was simultaneously true and unambiguous, and that earthly science did not already know. Shouldn't helpful aliens tell us about dangers that aren't already subject to *Angst* in our own, human media? Why no offers of new, cleaner technologies? These abductees only relate vague platitudes about kindness and sensitivity.

If aliens are so darn anxious that we're spoiling the planet, why not simply break into the airwaves and talk to us directly? They'd be TV sensations. We'd all pay close heed. In contrast, we hear vague rumors of kidnappings, wires-stuck-in-brains and weird impregnations, hardly the acts of honest, caring visitors. But "abductees" (and writers preying on these confused folk) never seem to notice this, or get angry at such behaviors.

Given horrific tales of criminality from above, one might imagine some support from the U.S. Air Force! Instead the government is unquestioningly portrayed as conspiratorially vile, an interesting reflection on the times, and a sad comment on the once highly-regarded John Mack.

Finally, Dewan's brusque dismissal of the bright, inquisitive and courageous young scientists involved in SETI (the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) does both them and her an injustice. The topic is real and profoundly fasci-

nating, worthy of attention by adults. Alas, it has been poisoned by the sort of uncritical, exploitative, sensationalizing volume Susan Dewan so gushingly praised.

DAVID BRIN  
ENCINITAS

I can only assume you ran Susan Dewan's review of "Abduction" (Aug. 7) for laughs! Without even mentioning whether the book is a psychological evaluation of alleged UFO abductees or an assessment of their credibility, the reviewer wanders off into a wilderness of New Wave ideas, astonished by the revelations from other worlds (channeled through the abductees, of course) that we Earthlings are running amok.

To top it off, the reviewer casts aspersions at the SETI program (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), while showing her complete ignorance of it. First, it is not government supported, as she contends, apparently having missed the news of its cancellation. Second, it does not seek extraterrestrial intelligence by "sending radio waves into space" as she writes, but by receiving them.

Third, she apparently does not realize that the only way to communicate through the vacuum of space (until we master gravity waves—if they exist) is by electromagnetic waves. This truth begs a key question, which is ignored: If beings from other worlds are around, why aren't the airways full of their electromagnetic messages?

The picture accompanying the review (of a hubcap flying by some bushes) from Air Force archives provides the final guffaw. Did we forget that the USAF followed UFOs for years without finding any credible evidence of visitors from outer space?

J.C. TOOMAY  
CARLSBAD

### INFORMATION SOUGHT

If you have an unusual and/or humorous blind date anecdote(s) or experiences answering the "personals," please mail them with your name and address to: P.O. Box 644, Livingston, N.J. 07039. Submission of material indicates permission for use in publication; name will be kept confidential.

EILEEN A. KOHUTIS, Ph.D.

I am working on a biography of Norman Clyde (1885-1972), nature writer and mountaineer who made numerous first ascents in the Sierra Nevada and elsewhere. I am interested in hearing from anyone who has firsthand knowledge of Clyde, and who is willing to share their stories (as well as photos and letters, if possible) with me.

ROBERT PAVLIK  
255 SAN AUGUSTIN DRIVE  
PASO ROBLES, CALIF. 93446  
(805) 237-0209

For a book of interviews with German-Americans who were born in Germany between 1939-1949, please contact Ursula Hegi, Box 104, Nine Mile Falls, Wash. 99026.

I am researching a biography of former Alcatraz inmate Sam Shockley, who was involved in the great escape attempt of 1946. If you have any information that may be helpful, please contact:

JENNIE S. BROWN  
2839 S. FAIRVIEW #A  
SANTA ANA, CA 92704

The Book Review welcomes expressions of all views from readers. Letters should be kept as brief as possible and are subject to condensation. They must include a signature, a valid mailing address and a phone number. Because of the volume of mail received, unpublished individual letters cannot be acknowledged. Send to:

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