

****Queergedacht – Chapter 23 (René Gehring)****

****Caroline L. Shanks and Werner E. Lange: The Fight for the Abolition of Slavery as a Model****

The chapter begins with two guest articles: one from 1931 that deals with the biblical arguments against slavery that were used in the USA in the 19th century. The second describes how early Adventists actively opposed slavery.

From these two articles, the author draws several comparisons. These place the rejection of same-sex marriages in proximity to the inhuman treatment of slaves in the USA at that time. The following parallels are drawn:

1. Slaveholders at that time insisted on biblical texts to uphold the institution of slavery. Similarly, from the author's perspective, Christians today fight against same-sex monogamous relationships using biblical statements.
2. At that time, the war was initiated by proponents of slavery. Today—one reads between the lines—the theological struggle arises from stubborn individuals unwilling to give up their antiquated views.
3. Many people at that time recognized the acute grievances in slavery. A societal awareness of the injustice of this system emerged. Christians took this as an opportunity to question the traditional interpretation of the relevant biblical texts. The author suggests that we, too, must reinterpret biblical statements in light of current grievances. (This reinterpretation is then immediately provided in the book **Queergedacht**.)
4. This reinterpretation is meant to fulfill the New Testament Christian demand for the equal treatment of all people and to respect human rights. Galatians 3:28 ultimately abolishes the distinction between slave and free, and also between man and woman. Therefore, the gender difference in monogamous relationships should no longer be relevant.
5. At that time, churches split over the question of slavery. Today, churches are experiencing divisions over the recognition of same-sex partnerships. The author seems to accept this risk willingly.

This comparison of then and now contains several significant errors.

First, it is important to understand that the enslavement of dark-skinned people in the USA was never biblically justified. The servitude relationship described in God's Word cannot be compared to the situation in the USA. The term is the same, but the content and historical circumstances are entirely different.

Slavery in the USA was deeply intertwined with racism and contempt for humanity. Slaves were often not considered humans but rather like livestock. They were frequently regarded as soulless. Marriages were ruthlessly torn apart, and small children were separated from their parents to be sold. For this devilish system, people were even stolen from Africa at the outset. Tens of thousands lost their lives during the passage. Many died from diseases and

malnutrition before they even arrived in the USA. All this stands in stark contrast to the law of God. Even if the term “slave” is used in the Bible, it has nothing to do with the conditions in the USA at that time.

Our understanding of slavery is so profoundly shaped by these more recent historical realities that we overlook that the system of servitude tolerated by God was very humane.

God made it clear from the beginning that people must not be stolen and sold: Exodus 21:16. The death penalty was even prescribed for this. No slave was at the mercy of his master—on the contrary. In Deuteronomy 23:16-17, we read: “You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall dwell with you in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not oppress him.” Every slave had the right to leave his master if he was treated poorly.

Furthermore, God explicitly states in Leviticus 24:22: “You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the LORD your God.” Every slave was to rejoice on the Sabbath, during the Sabbath year, and under extensive protection laws. These can be found in Exodus 21 and prohibit neglect and violence so strictly that immediate release had to be granted if a master violated them.

Slavery in the USA was never biblically justifiable. It was always wrong. This was recognized by more and more people over time. The supposed parallel to homosexual relationships is misleading.

This is about moral standards prescribed by God, not human atrocities. These standards have not changed. If there is any development regarding sexual morality in the Bible, it is rather towards it becoming stricter, returning closer to the original concept of marriage from Genesis 2!

In the Old Testament, for example, polygamy is tolerated as a cultural practice, meaning a man having multiple wives. While it is seen that this has negative consequences, it is not expressly forbidden or abolished, only limited (see, for example, Exodus 21:10-11). In the New Testament, polygamy is no longer found at all.

When Jesus spoke about the sexual morality of the Old Testament, He never relativized it. On the contrary, He rather tightened it. Regarding divorce, He points to Genesis 2:24 as the ideal—one man and one woman in a lifelong bond. When it comes to adultery, He explains that it even begins in thought (Matthew 5:27-28). The Bible provides no basis for reinterpreting the texts on homosexuality or loosening the prohibition of homosexuality.

Therefore, it is not fair to accuse a congregation of discrimination simply because it adheres to divine sexual laws. It must prohibit its members from homosexual contacts—even within a monogamous relationship—because the Word of God stipulates it.

What this says about the personal behavior of congregation members towards queer Christians is still undetermined. On a personal level, there must be a friendly, loving, respectful manner of interaction. However, this does not mean that one endorses sexual

practices that are explicitly forbidden in our shared foundation of faith, the Word of God, simply out of kindness.

Galatians 3:28, the only biblical text cited in this section, does not relate to issues of sexuality and marriage. Instead, it clarifies that men and women, as well as slaves and free people, possess the same value before God. All are heirs of eternal salvation. To see the abolition of the gender difference established in the creation order in this verse is a misuse of the text. This would stand in stark contradiction to other clear statements in the Bible. The proposed, erroneous understanding is merely fuel for the gender mainstream ideology. It is not a biblical interpretation that would do justice to the immediate as well as the overall biblical context.
