

# Letters From the Lavender Elite

*Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America*, by Mel White, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1994, 333 pages, hardcover, \$23.00.

*Coming Out Conservative: An Autobiography*, by Marvin Liebman, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992, 272 pages, hardcover, \$19.95.

When Talleyrand was asked why he had never bothered to write his autobiography, that singularly wily personality replied, "Because I have nothing to hide." With few exceptions, political autobiographies traffic in selective disclosure and artful image maintenance. This is particularly true of these two relentlessly self-serving memoirs.

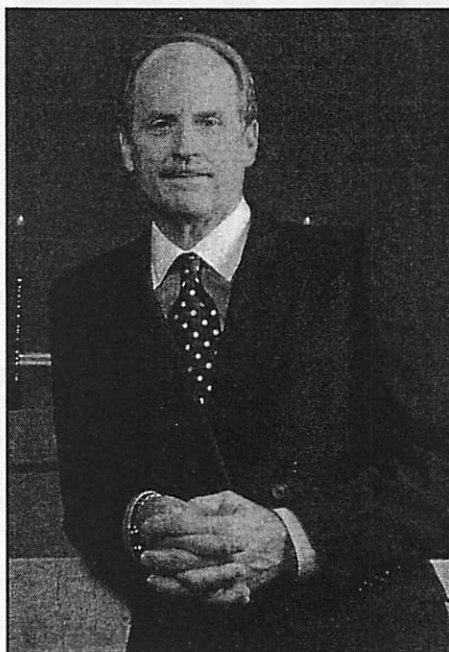
Both Mel White and Marvin Liebman acquired influence through mercenary means — White by working as a ghost-writer for various religious figures (such as the Reverends Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson), and Liebman through his work as a fund-raiser for various conservative groups. Although they both insist that they were "born" homosexual and have long suffered as a result of the religious right's "intolerance," neither felt any scruples about taking money from conservative employers, waiting instead to "come out" publicly when doing so became lucrative.

## "Gay" and Christian

Mel White "came out" three years ago in a series of letters written to his erstwhile employers. He has since become the dean of Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas, which describes itself as "the largest gay church in the world." From that facility, White campaigns against the religious right, and has spoken of his desire to facilitate a "class-action lawsuit in fifty states" to have the activities of the religious right "stopped." In an interview published in the April 5th *USA Today*, White condemned Falwell, Robertson, "and my other old clients on the religious right whose anti-gay rhetoric is killing us."

*Stranger at the Gate* is an amalgam of self-justification and political polem-

ics. Nowhere in the book's 333 pages does White admit to a flaw or a shortcoming other than the "internalized homophobia" that he supposedly displayed by seeking to overcome homosexuality. From White's perspective, homosexuals appear to enjoy a moral exemption as an "oppressed" class; everything they do, no matter how shock-



White has threatened the religious right with a "class-action lawsuit"

ing, profane, or violent, is to be justified as a reaction to societal "homophobia."

According to White, the religious right's opposition to homosexuality is a product of political opportunism: "[T]he end of communism [brought] the beginning of a whole new era in the history of gay bashing by the religious right... Without communism, [conservatives] had only two issues hot enough to mobilize their forces: abortion and homosexuality." However, White also proudly lists the victories that have been won during the past 20 years by the "gay rights" movement, such as hate crime and state-level "civil rights" laws, "domestic partner" policies for corporations and city governments, and the repeal of sodomy laws in more than a score of states. This demonstrates that Christian opposition to the Lavender Revolution

is inspired by something more substantial than the labors of direct mail wizards.

Although he offers a ritual condemnation of conservative Christians as extremists who "don't believe in the separation of church and state," White's ministry is explicitly political. As the beneficiary of a Rockefeller Foundation grant in the mid-1960s, White attended Fuller Theological Seminary, where he developed an attachment to the "social gospel" of political activism. Throughout his book, White pays homage to the black civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., another religious figure who taught that redemption comes through state action.

Not surprisingly, White's illogic quickly becomes unalloyed hypocrisy. He accuses the religious right of wanting "gay and lesbian voices silenced," of seeking "to quiet those who would speak or write on our behalf," "demanding that the shelves of the nation's libraries be stripped of gay and lesbian periodicals," and other acts of supposed censorship. However, in tactical instructions offered to homosexual activists in an appendix, White urges: "Organize your new coalitions to call radio and television stations quoting the offenders [i.e., conservative commentators], suggesting they be taken off the air. Follow up with public or even legal pressure when the inflammatory rhetoric continues."

Most audacious of all is White's treatment of the biblical passages condemning homosexuality. He repeatedly refers to his "God-given sexual orientation" and maintains that homosexual encounters he had while married were somehow inspired by God. White ludicrously insists that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a punishment for selfishness and a "lack of hospitality," rather than sexual perversion.

As to the burden of biblical teachings regarding sexual propriety, White is dismissive: "If you know anything about those six biblical passages used to attack and condemn us, you will admit that the authors never once speak of 'sexual orientation.'" This is true:

Scriptural authors were too preoccupied with the task of conveying God's word to mankind to anticipate every nuance of modern intellectual vanity. "Sexual orientation" is a concept devoid of both scientific merit and moral standing; it is a dogma inflicted upon the world by Kinsey and his intellectual kindred. The relative scarcity of verses dealing explicitly with homosexuality is irrelevant, as the Bible unambiguously teaches that the only divinely authorized use of the sexual function is that which occurs between a married man and woman.

### A Peculiar "Conservative"

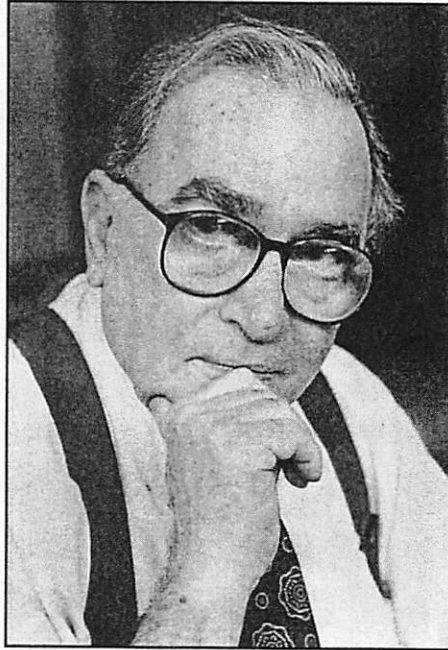
Marvin Liebman has long been associated with the William F. Buckley Jr./*National Review* clique. He was a founder of Young Americans for Freedom and an energetic fund-raiser for various ad hoc conservative organizations in the early 1960s. In a letter published in the July 9, 1990 issue of *National Review*, Liebman (who is now a federal bureaucrat — an unlikely occupation for a genuine conservative) publicly disclosed his homosexuality. Since then he has devoted great energy to the task of condemning what he refers to as the right wing's "return to the fever swamps."

Liebman's political career began in adolescence when he joined the American Student Union, a communist front group. Shortly thereafter he was invited to join the Young Communist League, and as a member of that group he visited the White House in 1939. FDR offended Liebman and his young comrades by dismissing the claim that Finland had invaded the Soviet Union (which at the time was a communist article of faith) as "twaddle." Liebman's group booed the President, a gesture that earned headlines and a conciliatory visit from Eleanor Roosevelt.

Liebman was a poor student, preferring leftist politics to academics. He also had a visceral aversion to manual labor, lending his services instead to whatever socialist cause he could find until his draft notice came in 1942. Because of his faulty eyesight, Liebman was inducted into the Army Air Corps on a "limited service" basis. Although he was excited by the prospect of joining the "fight against fascism," he had little aptitude or appetite for military life. He did find some consolation in his

contacts with the communist underground in Italy and his occasional homosexual liaisons. Eventually his sexual habits were discovered and he was discharged. He drifted into a communist cell in New York City, where he discovered the homosexual underground.

Liebman left the American communist movement after the Stalinists took over. He briefly dabbled in existentialism, and then found a new home in secular Zionism. His fund-raising efforts on behalf of the infant state of Israel led him to profitable contacts in



Liebman has beseeched Bill Buckley for another purge of conservatism

politics and entertainment. They also revealed what he describes as a talent for "shaming" people into donating money to a cause. It was this facility for profitable pathos that made Liebman so valuable to the Buckley clique.

Throughout *Coming Out Conservative*, Liebman pays tribute to Buckley for making conservatism "respectable." For Liebman, the conservative movement represented little more than a series of fund-raising opportunities. He had little use for those elements of the conservative movement — such as the John Birch Society — which deviated from the Establishment party line on significant questions. Although he had left the communist movement because he could not countenance its Stalinist rigidity, Liebman was among those who urged Buckley to "excommunicate" the Birch Society and other patriotic orga-

nizations from the conservative "mainstream."

Like White, Liebman maintains that conservative opposition to the "gay rights" movement is unprincipled:

When Communism began its demise with the fall of the Berlin Wall, a frenzied search began within the American Right for something to replace anticommunism as the central issue that held the "conservative movement" together for more than thirty years. The standard old bogeymen — Jews, Catholics, blacks, foreigners — were still around. But they were well organized and far more difficult to use as scapegoats. But there was one group that could be used as a target: homosexuals. The spreading AIDS epidemic and the growing activism of the gay and lesbian community provided the hate-mongers with the perfect victims at a perfect time.

It takes a great deal of temerity for a professional political pilgrim — one who flitted from cause to cause in pursuit of fund-raising opportunities — to accuse dedicated conservatives of conducting a "frenzied search" for a unifying enemy. Even more repulsive is Liebman's habit of dismissing traditionalists as "bigots" who "have little in common" with "true conservatism." If one wants to learn of what true conservatism consists he could find a much better exemplar than a homosexual excommunist who is employed by the federal bureaucracy.

Liebman's "coming out" letter urged Buckley to conduct a new purge of conservatism: "*National Review* lifted conservatism to a more enlightened plane, away from a tendency to engage in the manipulation of base motives, prejudices, and desires.... One day the conservative movement will recognize that there are gays among us who have advanced our cause. They should not be victims of small-mindedness, prejudice, fear, or cynicism.... *National Review* could have an important role here, once again guiding conservatives toward the more enlightened path." Buckley responded with qualified agreement: "*National Review* will not be scarred by thoughtless gay-bashing, let alone animated by such practices.... You are ab-

solutely correct in saying that gays should be welcome as partners in minting sound public policies....”

Liebman’s decision to write his autobiography was inspired by the public controversy over federal funding for Robert Mapplethorpe’s pornographic “art.” He contends that the anti-Mapplethorpe campaign signaled the commencement of a campaign of bigotry:

The hue and cry over funding the late Robert Mapplethorpe’s homoerotic photography exhibits had nothing to do with the [National Endowment for the Arts]. It had everything to do with anti-homosexual bigotry, just as groups objecting to various US aid programs to Israel have nothing to do with foreign policy but have everything to do with anti-Semitism. In our time, bigotry is more subtle than a cossack beating a Jew with a club for the joy of it, or castrating a homosexual just to hear him scream. Today, bigotry masquerades in many guises — conservatism, morality, religion, family — but it’s the same as the barbarian’s knout or Mengele’s surgical blade.

Apparently, Liebman has found his new enemy — it is all of us who rebel when the federal government conscripts our taxes to enrich pornographic photographers or socialist politicians in Israel (or any other foreign country), who are devoted to biblical religion, conventional morality, and the traditional family.

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Mel White depicts the religious right as the new Nazism, and has spoken publicly of filing “a class-action law suit in fifty states to have it stopped.” Marvin Liebman prefers to portray conventional conservatism as the new Stalinism, and suggests that a new Cold War should be fought against this new “enemy”: “The threat to America no longer comes from the U.S.S.R. It comes again from within, from organizations that advocate racism and sexism and preach discrimination against Jews, blacks, Mexicans, Asians, and homosexuals.” White and Liebman are typical of those who feel that their rights remain unvindicated as long as true conservatives remain free to express their views. ■

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