

Fighting Gays; Finding Freedom

The Christian Right Battle Against Same-Sex Marriage

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*Fighting Gays; Finding Freedom:
The Christian Right Battle Against Same-Sex Marriage*

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Introduction

In Europe, where national identity is predominantly related to community and derived from sharing a common history, the idea of e.g. a native Dane being mocked as un-Danish seems rather peculiar. As Seymour Martin Lipset has noted, this community-based identity actually entirely eliminates the notions of un-Danish, un-English and so on. On the other hand, in the United States where being born in the country traditionally has never been a prerequisite for becoming American in spirit, national identity instead is “an ideological commitment,” and thus the unflattering term *un-American* is often heard used of those who reject that ideology which makes an American. However, the ingredients to these values, and those regarded as un-American have continuously been contested.¹

Born out of revolution, the United States is based around an ideology containing a set of dogmas about the nature of a good and free society. “We shall be as a city upon a hill,” declared John Winthrop, pointing to the special covenant he and his fellow Puritan settlers shared with God, and which should lay the foundation of a new and just society. A civilization set to serve as an example to the rest of the world.² “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed,” wrote G. K. Chesterton, and “that creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence.”³ At the time of writing, another founding document, the Bill of Rights secured the American citizen a number of specific rights and liberties, which often had not been available in the “old countries” of Europe. These freedoms, e.g. of association, of expression, to bear arms, etc. are quite clear in meaning. The controversies have historically arisen when the concept of liberty is

¹ Jenkins, Brian and Spyros A. Sofos (1996): “Nation and Nationalism in Contemporary Europe: A Theoretical Perspective” in *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe*. Edited by Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos. London: Routledge. pp. 9-32; Lipset, Seymour Martin (1996): *American Exceptionalism. A Double-Edged Sword*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, p. 31.

² Winthrop, John (1630): “A Modell of Christian Charity” in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston, 1838), 3rd series 7:31-48. p. 47. Available from <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html> (Accessed 19 October 2006).

³ Chesterton, G. K. (1927): *What I Saw in America*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 13.

connected to the role of the individual within the community. In this context, freedom has historically been a double-edged concept, with a set of binary definitions.

Isaiah Berlin wrote of “positive freedom;” an individual’s wish “to be his own master” without external interference, versus “negative freedom;” a diluted degree of freedom caused when an external body intrudes individual activities.⁴ Historian Eric Foner has given much thought to another set of rivalling definitions specifically characterizing American perceptions of freedom; one religiously laden and the other liberal and secularised in nature and:

From the Puritan settlers to many modern conservatives, freedom has meant above all the capacity to act according to an ethical standard. This definition stands in uneasy tension with another recurring dimension -personal freedom, or the ability to make crucial individual choices free from outside coercion.⁵

During the past decade, one single issue has grasped the essence of this ongoing struggle in America, namely that of same-sex marriage. While those supporting the ideology of ‘personal freedom’ have perceived such arrangements as a civil rights matter that should be equally accessible to every citizen despite of sexual orientation, to traditionalists, letting homosexuals marry is perceived incompatible with their moral and religious beliefs, thus drawing up the conflicting concepts of freedom. These distinct traditions become evident when outlining two opposing arguments typical of the marriage debate.

On one side, overwhelming support for same-sex marriage can be found in liberal academia where a large number of articles and books have been published on the subject. An example of such support can be gathered from R. Claire Snyder:

The United States was founded as a “liberal democracy,” in which a secular government acts to protect the civil rights and liberties of individuals rather than imposing a particular vision of the “good life” on its citizens.⁶

In other words same-sex marriage should be available, since a certain legal definition allowing for only traditional marriage would be a restriction of individual liberties.

⁴ Berlin, Isaiah (1958). “The Two Concepts of Liberty”. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958. Reprinted in Isaiah Berlin: *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*. (Edited by Henry Hardy) Oxford: OUP 2002. pp. 170-178.

⁵ Foner, Eric (1998), *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, pp. xvii-xviii.

⁶ Snyder, R. Claire (2002): “The Right Family Issues” in *The Public Eye*. Fall 2002 Vol. xvi, No. 3, 1-11. p. 1.

This type of outside intrusion would be inconsistent with the individual's right to act freely as long as it is not harmful to the remaining community.

Equally sharp rhetoric springs from the opposition. The strongest political activism against same-sex marriage, and gay rights in general, is found among evangelical activists and Christian conservatives.⁷ In a television interview, the deeply religious and now former Republican Senator, Rick Santorum, explained his perception of personal liberties:

I don't believe that people should be empowered to do what pleases them the most. We have a responsibility beyond ourselves. [...] Particular in the area of sexual freedom, and personal issues, this is the mantra of the left, which is: I have a right to do as I want to do, and that is not the kind of freedom that our founders envisioned and it is not the kind of freedom that makes up a society that is devoted [...] to the common good.⁸

American freedom, in Santorum's argument is attached to a set of communal responsibilities and dependent on the individual's ability to conform in compliance with a moral, ethical and religious standard. Same-sex marriage would be promoting homosexuality, which is a moral sin, and thus should be banned. Secondly, same-sex marriage would be damaging to the existing traditional family, as envisioned by God and have a harmful effect on the entire society.

From this author's perspective, the far most interesting argument lays in the self-contradictory nature of the Santorum statement, which automatically forms the conundrum: How can freedom be defined through restrictions of personal liberties? As mentioned, some of the most visible representatives of this ideology in the United States at present can be found among fundamentalist Christians, which is the reason for choosing to focus on the Christian Right in the attempt to answer the following research question:

**How does the Christian Right justify its opposition to same-sex marriage,
and how can this be interpreted as a defence of American freedom?**

⁷ Wilcox, Clyde and Carin Larson (2006): *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics*. Boulder: Westview. pp. 105-107; Cahill, Sean (2004): *Same-Sex Marriage in the United States. Focus on the Facts*. Lanham: Lexington Books. pp. 19-20.

⁸ Santorum, Rick (2005a): In television interview "Nitebeat with Barry Nolan" on CN8, 28 July 2005. Available from <http://santorumexposed.com/pages/video/video.php> (Accessed on 1 December 2006).

In the process of answering my principal question, I wish to do at least five things:
(1) identify the historical tradition to which the Christian Right belongs; (2) determine which concept of freedom this tradition is implicitly advocating; (3) find which types of rhetorical strategies that have become available to the Christian Right from this tradition, and identify where these have been activated in various cases; (4) investigate how the Christian Right in practice is fighting same-sex marriage and trace the shifts in antigay discourse over time and on different political levels; and (5) consider the current fight against same-sex marriage as part of a broader political agenda of the Christian Right and in this context discuss the movement's notion of America as a Christian nation.

Aim

When every politician, be that local, state or federal, is asked today on his or her stand on same-sex marriage, there lies more to that question than a political opinion on homosexuality. The provided answer also reveals that person's view on what is required of a citizen to enjoy certain rights in America and the boundaries of individual autonomy and behaviour that should be legally protected or even encouraged by the state. Hopefully it has already been established by now, that at the heart of this prominent debate lies a broader and seemingly endless discussion on American freedom, and despite the obvious nature of same-sex marriage as a gay rights issue, it has always been the intention that the final outcome of this work should be perceived in a wider scope. Thus, focusing on freedom and same-sex marriage collectively was made in an honest attempt to contribute to core issues within the academic field of American studies in a number of ways.

Firstly, since American freedom among other things is as a set of rights attached to being an American, the tracing of its lineaments will also imply who is to enjoy freedom, and by doing so ultimately suggest what an American is.

Secondly, the notion and identification of two main opposing concepts of freedom preeminent within the United States, one religiously charged and the other profoundly secular in ideology draws parallels to another fundamental discussion in American founding history: Is America a Christian nation, a secularised republic or somewhere in between?

Thirdly, the case study will provide grounds for another compelling discussion often recurring in American civil rights history, namely that of freedom versus equality and the power structure between the two concepts, as granting equal rights to one group often means taking away civil liberties of another.

So, it is my hope that this case study will reveal, that underneath the explicit dispute on same-sex marriage lays a greater discussion on personal freedom itself. - A discussion that goes beyond gay rights' activists and religious radicals, and becomes

relevant to the American majority also. Given the character of the subject, some of the ultimate findings in this work will hopefully be found to be applicable to other current discussions on moral issues in the United States such as abortion or stem cell research.

Delimitation

The somewhat unconventional choice of carrying out an interdisciplinary conceptual analysis of American freedom, by studying the Christian Right and its negative position towards same-sex marriage, naturally brings out a series of challenges, which must be considered and dealt with, in order to reach the desired outcome. This paper essentially operates within three different areas, which are traditionally affiliated with each their disciplinary field of study. From a scholarly perspective, same-sex marriage is often seen analysed within the social sciences, and has in the past years been the topic of numerous works in gender and queer studies. In the same way, the legal aspects of the matter have proven a viable case study for those researching in constitutional law.⁹

Nevertheless, it is the arguments in the debate, and not the sociological effects or ultimate legal outcome of same-sex marriage that this work will focus on. These arguments will be interpreted as a current semantic field in which different freedom discourses are activated and contested. I will return to how the discursive analysis will be extracted from the marriage debate in the methodological chapter.

As have been pointed out, the Christian Right is a leading campaigner against same-sex marriages, and this in itself makes the movement's platform an obvious choice for further research. The intention, however, is not a study of social movements as such, or yet another example of Christian or right wing bashing in a left-leaning paper. Rather, it is a sincere attempt to outline and trace the boundaries of a distinctly

⁹ See for example: Gerstmann, Evan (2003): *Same-Sex Marriage and the Constitution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Strasser, Mark Philip (2002): *On Same-Sex Marriage, Civil Unions, and the Rule of Law. Constitutional Interpretation at the Crossroads*. Westport: Praeger Publishers.

American and profoundly religious concept of freedom dating back to the first British settlements in America, and of which the current Christian Right must be considered a present advocate.

At its core, the study of freedom has traditionally been a field dominated by political philosophers such as Isaiah Berlin, John Locke and John Stuart Mill. Despite their European descent, their scholarly contributions to the theory of liberty have also proven highly influential in later studies of American freedom and liberalism. Still, the philosophy of freedom in this context is not an immediate concern. One straightforward strategy would be a literary review of presently available works on freedom. I have generally found these works to fall in one of two categories, and none of which fit neither my interest in the subject nor the scope of this thesis. One part I have regarded as profoundly philosophical in nature and thus falling outside both the scope of the research question as well as what traditionally has been considered American studies material.¹⁰

The other part is made up of comprehensive encyclopaedic works containing a vast amount of material seeking to lay out the conceptual history of freedom from every imaginable angle, which ultimately has left this author with a good sense of overview, but also with a wish for more in-depth analysis on specific topics in which the concept of freedom has been distilled. Of these works, *The History of American Freedom* by Eric Foner has received massive appreciation and been a great source of inspiration in the production of this paper.¹¹ Accordingly, the method I have chosen to deal with American freedom principles will also be in a type of historical conceptual analysis, but read through one single issue; same-sex marriage. This choice has been made both as a way to avoid becoming too comprehensive in aim and volume, but more importantly to steer clear of the pitfall of *reading freedom* in just any event or discussion without the necessary critical approach to the subject.

¹⁰ Some interesting examples in this category are: Carter, Ian (1999): *A Measure of Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press; Kramer, Matthew H. (2003): *The Quality of Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹¹ Foner (1998).

Definition of key concepts

Freedom

The two terms *freedom* and *liberty* and their individual meaning and differences have been subject of some academic debate. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin points to the fact that English is the only European language that even offers a choice and notes how Germans are just left with *Freiheit* and the French with *liberté*. Pitkin's conclusion in her article *Are Freedom and Liberty Twins?* is that there are in fact distinctions between the two, but in the same paragraph admits that until a wider scholarly consensus on the subject has been achieved these differences will in fact remain "the theorist's own."¹² For this reason, this author has respectfully chosen to use the two words interchangeably. Accordingly, the terms will also be treated equally in the empirical.

The Christian Right

The Christian Right is a social movement that attempts to mobilize evangelical Protestants and other orthodox Christians into conservative political action. Both leaders within the movement as well as academic scholars have debated the term Christian Right.¹³ *Religious Right* is another term sometimes used with the advantage of including conservative Jews and possibly Muslims. However, the label *Christian Right* has purposely been chosen in this work for obvious reasons, as fundamentalist Christians traditionally have been the most publicly active constituency in opposition to gay rights and same-sex marriage, just as their religious history can be traced back to the founding of the nation; a central element for the later analysis.¹⁴

The Christian Right (from here on CR) is comprised by local and national organisations, their leaders, members and activists, and it seeks to gather support from a wide potential constituency. According to Robert Zwier this constituency is

¹² Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. "Are Freedom and Liberty Twins?" in *Political Theory*, Vol. 16 No. 4, November 1988 523-552. p. 547.

¹³ Herman, Didi (1997): *The Antigay Agenda. Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right*. Chicago: The University Press of Chicago. pp. 12-14; Wilcox and Larson (2006): pp. 6-8.

¹⁴ Morone, James A. (2003): *Hellfire Nation. The Politics of Sin in American History*, New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 450-455.

encompassed by the approximately 50 million evangelicals in the United States, and in particular the fundamentalist wing of that community. “The aim from the beginning

was to mobilize a group of people who had traditionally avoided politics because they saw it as dirty, corrupt business [...] by convincing people that political involvement was a God-given responsibility.¹⁵

It is evident that nowhere near 50 million Americans share the same fundamentalist worldview as portrayed by theocratic leaders like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson or D. James Kennedy and many supporters find themselves divided on different core issues of the movement.¹⁶ In addition it is no difficult task spotting traditional Christian values throughout the spectre of American society and political thinking. Still, empirical focus will be held on orthodox arguments represented by prominent persons either within CR organizations or Christian conservatives affiliated or endorsed by the movement.

Marriage

A look in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives this definition of *marriage*:

(1): the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law (2): the state of being united to a person of the same sex in a relationship like that of a traditional marriage <same-sex marriage>.¹⁷

It may seem superfluous to provide this information, but the thing to note here is the emphasis on legal recognition, which is what the same-sex marriage debate is all about. According to the United States Government Accountability Office, there are over a thousand federal laws that treat married citizens differently from single citizens. These rights and responsibilities apply only to male-female married couples, as the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act defines marriage as between a man and a woman and thus bars same-sex couples from receiving any federal recognition or conveyance of marriage benefits to same-sex couples through federal marriage law. That, even though same-sex marriage is legal in Massachusetts.¹⁸ (More information

¹⁵ Zwier, Robert. (1984): *Born-Again Politics: The new, Christian Right in America*. Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ Wilcox and Larson (2006): pp. 51-62.

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, definition of "marriage." Available from <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/marriage> (Accessed 10 October 2006).

¹⁸ United States General Accounting Office (2004): *Defense of Marriage Act: Update to Prior Report*. 23 January 2004. p. 1. Available from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04353r.pdf>; Cornell Law School: "§ 7. Definition of "marriage" and "spouse"" in *U.S. Code collection*. Available from http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode01/usc_sec_01_00000007----000-.html. (Accessed

on same-sex marriage legislation will follow.)

When I refer to *marriage* I mean the legal union that is recognised by both state as well as federal law. Various states have created legal unions for same-sex couples, however, these are not called marriage and vary in terms of rights and responsibilities and are *not* recognised by federal law. To gay rights groups, equal standing in the law is the essential goal, and thus the debate largely leaves out discussions on other arrangements such as civil unions or domestic partnerships etc.¹⁹ This thesis will reflect that.

Theoretical framework

As declared in the delimitation, this thesis is, despite the nature of its case study, deliberately steering clear of traditional practices of e.g. queer studies or gender studies within the field of American studies. It is to the study of American freedom to which this work is intended to contribute, and in this respect a discursive analytical strategy has been chosen in the tradition of historical conceptual analysis.

Seen in the light of the continuous semantic contestation on the concept of freedom in the United States, the same-sex marriage debate is not a new discussion but rather a current example on a string of many, tracing the boundaries of the concept, and thus should also be analyzed in a greater historical context. The theoretical framework to undertake such a conceptual analysis should address the following issues: How are concepts (and their discourses) constructed and interpreted? How are they constructed and changed over time? And finally, focus on the partition of, and mutual power structure between the discourses.

10 October 2006).

¹⁹ Chauncey, George (2004): *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality*. New York: Basic Books. pp. 1-5; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force: *Why Civil Unions Are Not Enough*. Published 18 May 2005. Available from http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/fact_sheets/civil_unions. (Accessed 10 October 2006).

One particular strategy, which by and large takes these requirements into account, can be derived from Reinhart Koselleck's theories on *Begriffsgeschichte*, a constructivist framework placed within the discipline of social history.²⁰

The primary devotion to the concept of freedom within the current marriage debate, rather than undertaking the massive and unfit task of writing the entire history of American freedom, in some regards places this thesis in the periphery of Koselleck's strategy which originally has resulted in comprehensive encyclopaedic works on the history of various concepts such as politics, citizen, nature, etc. However, as Åkerstrøm has noted, "from a discourse analysis perspective, Koselleck's contribution is of the greatest interest," and thus still in this author's view provides an applicable theoretical structure fitting for the purpose of this work.²¹

Koselleck's history of concepts provides an analytical strategy which analyses history as a semantic struggle about turning words into concepts through the condensing of a wide range of meaning into the concepts. This, naturally, is not a linear history. A word can remain the same even though its meaning changes, just as a concept can remain the same despite its linguistic designation changes. Accordingly, concepts in Åkerstrøm's words "provide the portal to studies of the historical space of signification."²² But what, then, is a concept? Koselleck addresses the importance of distinguishing between word and concept as a way of not departing into a history of mere words, hence presenting his notion of concept in a triad composed by word (that is, designation), meaning (that is, concept) and object (that is, fact):

Each concept is associated with a word, but not every word is a social and political concept. Social and political concepts possess a substantial claim of generality and always have many meanings.²³

Freedom, as has already been established, is indeed ambiguous. Within its conceptual debate, the two traditions, which I will primarily focus on, have each added unique words or meaning to the concept. Freedom in the religious tradition is largely an

²⁰ Ifversen, Jan (2003): "Om den tyske begrebshistorie" in *Politologiske Studier*, Årgang 6 nr. 1 Maj 2003, 18-34. p. 18.

²¹ Andersen, Niels Åkerstrøm (2003): *Discursive Analytical Strategies. Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann*. Glasgow: Bell & Bain. p. 36.

²² Ibid. p. 39.

²³ Koselleck, Reinhart (1982): "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History" in *Economy and Society*, vol 11, no 4, 409-27, p. 418.

ethical concept, which must be in compliance with the Holy Scriptures. An associated word to freedom could then be *morality*. On the other hand, *choice* or *equality* are words added to the secular discourse in ways for freedom to possess its desired meaning. The specific words, or what I have chosen to call “sub-concepts” will be dealt with in the methodology.

Historical conceptual analysis as portrayed by Koselleck, consists of a combination of two analytics; a diachronic analysis that focuses on single concepts and their origins and transformation. The other, a synchronous analysis, studies the way concepts always come into being in relation to other concepts in a semantic field. Such a field is created as the relationship between concepts and their counter-concepts and it is this relationship that adds meaning to the individual concept. Synchronous analysis of certain semantic conflicts along the diachronic history line should then be conducted to trace the boundaries of the concept.

For the present analysis, this means studying the concept of freedom in a historical perspective. Not only as a means to understand the current freedom discussion, in this case, in the debate over same-sex marriage, but also as a way to trace the discursive traditions and their mutual semantic power struggle over time.

In order to conduct the synchronic analysis, Koselleck names a number of prelinguistic distinctions. These “couples of opposition” are differences or antithesis “without which no history can come to be, regardless of the forms they take on in particular cases – economic, religious, political, or social factors.”²⁴ These sets of binaries, as identified by Åkerstrøm, are as follows.

Any concept obtains meaning from its counter-concept, and hence it is crucial in the study of the shaping of a concept to give consideration to its counter-concept. A counter-concept is defined as a concept that is in opposition to another, e.g. man/woman, public/secret, tolerance/intolerance. In this case *unfreedom* would be the direct counter-concept to freedom. Also being a concept unfreedom too is ambiguous. To a libertarian for instance, a counter-concept to freedom could be *bureaucracy* or

²⁴ Koselleck, Reinhart (1989): “Linguistic change and the history of events” in *Journal of Modern History*, no 61, 649-66, p. 651.

big government. Along the same lines, the CR will proclaim *equal rights* as a counter-concept because they may hinder the free exercise and practice of religion.

Historical conceptual analysis should according to Åkerstrøm's "uncover that which applies over time as expectation and experience, but also the tensions and relationships between expectation and experience" and "must be exposed by the semantic analysis." History is by default balanced between a *before* and an *after*. This distinction is even prelinguistic in that generations succeed generations, which creates a series of overlapping fields of experience. In other words, historical times, and concepts, are continuously changing from the tension between expectation and experience. This point help us understand, both meaning and reason, for the type of freedom the current CR is promoting by studying its religious discursive tradition and previous semantic campaigns for a certain type of liberty.²⁵ Given recent victories in the courtrooms, gay rights activists have received renewed hope in their fight for same-sex marriage and thus have increased expectations to the kind of freedom they are likely to enjoy in the future. In this matter, the opposite is of course the rule for Christian fundamentalists. However, the CR has also had its own share of victories e.g. in several state referenda, banning same-sex marriage in state constitutions, suggesting that the freedom debate is ever contested.

The next two sets of binaries deal with the internal contestation between the semantic discourses. No society or human action exists without a distinction between inside/outside. To the extreme, this binary opposition is connected to that of friend and enemy, in the sense that meaning and support of this is created from the threat of an external rivalling discourse. Through its active campaigning against same-sex marriages, the CR seeks support for its cause in part by demonizing those groups in favour. The same thing is naturally in effect when gay rights activists portray their Christian opponents as religious fanatics who are out of touch with reality. Political identities, movements, parties etc. are constructed across the classification "us/them," from the mere fact that there cannot be an *us* without a *them*. This fact enables the possibility of studying the shaping of political identities in conjunction with the designation of concepts and their counter-concepts to specific identities: e.g. those of

²⁵ Åkerstrøm (2003): pp. 44-46.

conservative as opposed to liberal or Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice as opposed to the American Civil Liberties Union.

Finally, the "up/down" couple refers to the internal semantic power struggle within the community. In comparison with a democratic political system, different parties are fighting for power, and often the hierarchical structure is likely to change over time, and so are the discourses defining the ruling meaning of a concept.²⁶ Richard Foner has written of the American Red Scare as a period in which the internal fight against communism resulted in a restriction of personal liberties such as freedom of association. "60s freedom" however, was a liberal notion of freedom which could be read from the sexual revolution or the civil rights movement which prospered during the second half of the 1960s and early seventies.²⁷

Methodology

With the preceding theoretical framework in mind, I will attempt to clarify how I aim to read my empirical data in order to answer my proposed research question. The initial challenge will be to identify the way in which the CR is defending its notion of freedom through its opposition to same-sex marriage. In doing so, I will need to look further than just same-sex marriage, but at the marriage institution in a larger historical perspective. In relation to the theoretical framework, *marriage* is in this respect the semantic field in which the meaning of freedom is to be identified. Given the topic of the case study, focus on, and comparison to other historical contestations of the institution of marriage seems only natural and in line with Koselleck's theoretical strategy, that calls for synchronous analysis (and attention to those struggles through which concepts acquire concrete meaning), when tracing the history of single concepts along the diachronic line of analysis. Fortunately, this author has also found some previous academic acknowledgement in reflecting American freedom in the history of marriage as seen in Eric Foner's review of Nancy F. Cott's *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*:

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Foner (1998): p. 277.

Showing how marriage has always been regulated and shaped by the state, [...] not only recasts our understanding of this most intimate of relationships but enables us to think in new ways about concepts of privacy, public power, and ultimately, liberty itself in American history.²⁸

Now that I have established that it is by looking at the marriage institution that I will identify the CR's concept of freedom, its characteristics must be determined, just as I need to clarify from which historical tradition this concept is derived. Such a strategy will be in line with the diachronic analysis explained in the last chapter. When doing so, one will have to acknowledge the fact that freedom is seldom explicitly addressed in the marriage debate and the way I read my empirical must reflect that.

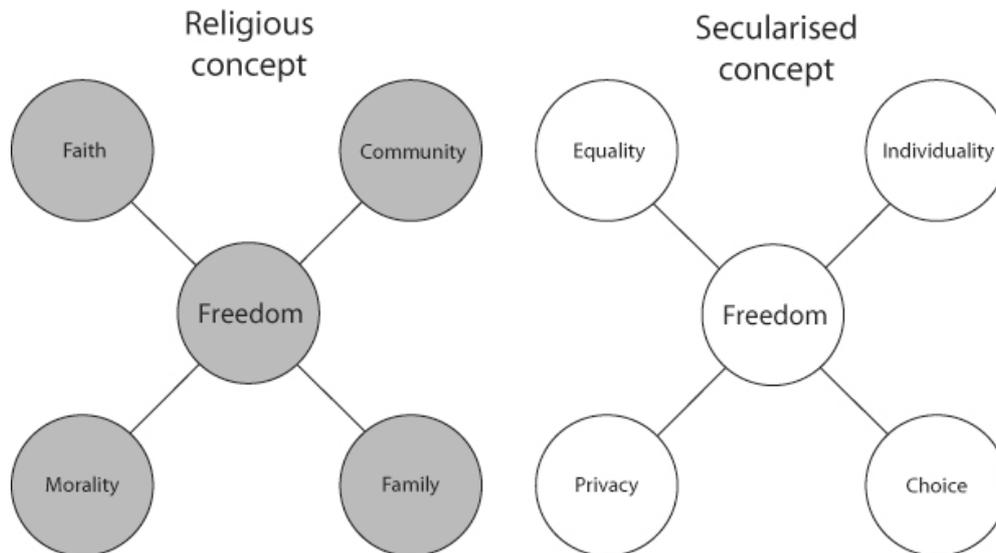
Freedom in itself is ambiguous but linked to words to which meaning is derived. When analyzing the freedom discourses in the marriage debate, the concepts are often implicitly positioned in relating sub-concepts, which also help define the main arguments for and against an issue such as same-sex marriage. So, when the CR argues its opposition to the issue by stating, that same-sex marriage (and homosexuality) is morally wrong, the underlying argument continues *...and the freedom to sin should not be allowed*. Freedom within each concept can in other words only be achieved if a number of these sub-concepts are fulfilled or present to a lesser or greater extent. For example, *faith* (or at least some degree of submission to the Scriptures) is a pre-requisite to freedom in the religious tradition, just as evangelical fundamentalists could argue that freedom lies *in* Christianity.

For this reason, links to the following models, illustrating the concepts of freedom and their respective cluster of sub-concepts, will be made to highlight the connections between the current debate on same-sex marriage to that on freedom itself.

²⁸ Foner's quote on Nancy F. Cott's *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (2002). Boston: Harvard University Press, is available from <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog/COTPUB.html?show=reviews> (Accessed 7 November 2006).

Figure 1 outlines the structure of each concept in light of the same-sex marriage debate:

Figure 1



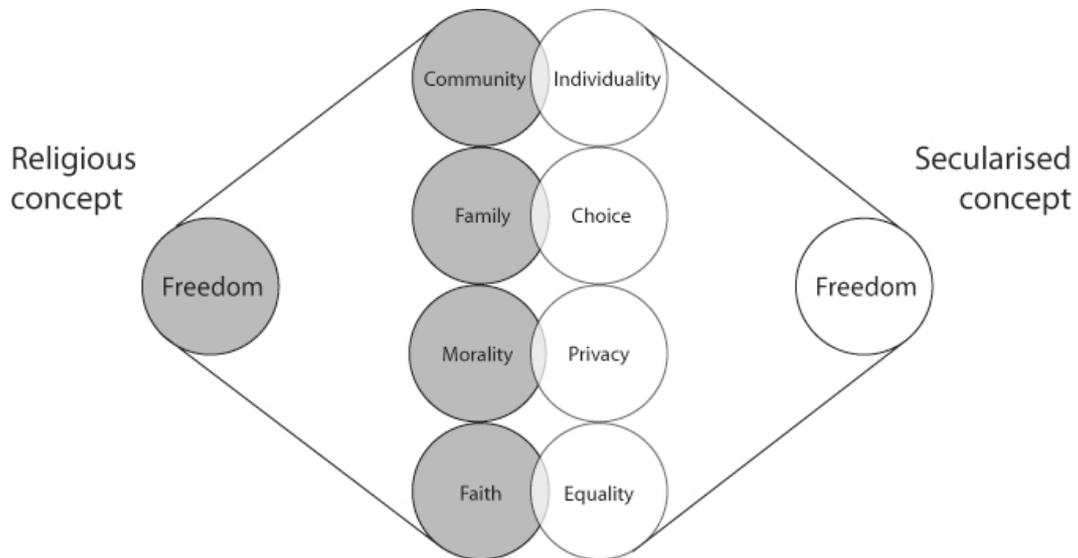
The model and choice of sub-concepts within the *religious* and *secularised* concepts is the author's own. However, they have been carefully chosen and sought to be in compliance with my theoretical references on the characteristics of two distinct interpretations of freedom. Also, these specific sub-concepts are found to embody the most frequent arguments in the same-sex marriage debate.

In theoretical terms, the two concepts reflect a number of freedoms previously discussed by prominent thinkers, scholars and political philosophers: To exemplify, the religious concept relates to a concentrated version of Berlin's *negative* freedom. Belonging to a profoundly religious ideology, it encompasses elements from Foner's portrait of *conservative* and *Christian* liberty or John Winthrop's notion of *civil* and *moral* liberty "to that only which is good, just, and honest." With its roots in Scriptural morality, this concept will in its purest form be referred to as *Biblical freedom*. In contrast, the secularised concept relates to Berlin's notion of *positive* liberty, a liberal idea as envisioned by John Stuart Mill who wrote that the only freedom which deserves recognition "is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it." Foner refers to such a concept as "personal freedom." However, since

also deeply religious people are able to achieve a sense of personal freedom, one could instead refer to this as *Liberal freedom*.²⁹ To avoid misinterpretation, it should be clarified that these two concepts in their purest form are sharply bipolar, thus talk of a general concept of American freedom, if such a consensus even exists, must be found somewhere in between.

In an attempt to illustrate how the debate on same-sex marriage implicitly contribute to the conceptual discussion on freedom, Figure 2 shows colliding sub-concepts causing the semantic struggle:

Figure 2



Upon defining this distinctively religious tradition in which a Biblical concept of freedom can be found, I need to turn my focus to those specific areas in which the CR has activated this tradition: The movement is presently fighting a culture war, against liberal forces. One of the battlegrounds is same-sex marriage where the CR is doing what it can to ‘defend marriage’ in a larger attempt to protect traditional family values and society as a whole. This type of moral campaigning should be analysed in ways to detect the current religious discourse. Another aspect of the marriage dispute, which will be analysed, is the issue of equality versus freedom. Is marriage a civil right that

²⁹ Berlin (1958): pp. 169-217; Foner (1998): pp. 3-15, 307-330; Winthrop, John (1945): “On Liberty” in Collins, Owen (editor) (1998): *Speeches That Changed the World*. 66-69. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. p. 68; Mill, John Stuart (1859): *On Liberty*. Toronto: Dover Publications, 2002. p. 10.

should be available to every American citizen regardless of the gender of its partner, or is same-sex marriage essentially a so-called 'special right' applicable only to homosexuals?

I intend to look at recent publications, interviews, statements etc. given by organisations or prominent figures within the CR movement in which the above notions are advocated in connection with the current same-sex marriage debate. It is here important to point to the fact that this debate is a product of a longer history of gay rights struggles between the CR and the gay rights movement, stretching back some 30 years, and the empirical data will reflect that. I will need to study concrete examples of how the CR is practically fighting same-sex marriage from grassroots level to the national political arena. These activities range from offering religious therapy to homosexuals to arranging ballot initiatives and political lobbying on state and federal levels. It is important not only to focus on a single area, as a Supreme Court ruling may go against public opinion and vice versa. From analysing these various activities and the level of support they gather, be it constitutional amendments or legal rulings, it will be possible to give some indications on the level of support the CR is receiving and finally which type of freedom is currently prevailing in the United States.

With these considerations in mind, the following describes how I intend to approach my subject. In Part 1, I have deliberately chosen works of John Winthrop and John Stuart Mill to represent the historical ideologies behind the 2 distinctly American interpretations of personal liberty. Furthermore, this chapter will rely on other historic literature and documents as well as contemporary works relevant to the subject. Part 2 and 3 focus on CR discourse and will rely heavily on empirical data. Part 2 looks at the movement's internal discourse. A primary source of information will be CR websites. Every major organisation has its own homepage and online archive used to carry its messages to members of the evangelical community. Academic studies on the CR will also be referred. Part 3 looks at public discourses in three different antigay campaigns in 1977, 2004, and 2006. The first will be analysed through secondary literature and previous studies of early CR political activism. The recent campaigns will be studied by looking at political ad campaigns, public statements and websites belonging to the action groups involved. General studies on CR discourse

will be used to support the empirical findings. Part 4 focuses on CR representation of the state, and will primarily discuss contemporary scholarly works representing a revisionist historiography on the relationship between church and state in America; a recent tradition that is widely supported and promoted within the CR.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind, that although all chapters of this thesis are interrelated, Part 2 through 4 can more or less be read independently due to their different focus. As a consequence, reflections on findings and results will also be made throughout this thesis, rather than being set aside for one final discussion.

Structure

Part 1 lays out the current terrain. It summarises the religious creed of the CR and illustrates how colonial Puritanism and the following Great Awakenings have influenced the movement's understanding of freedom and current political discourse. It also demonstrates how this religious tradition has been constantly challenged by one of secular origin, embracing individualism over authoritarianism. It will become evident that those two traditions are embodied in each their social movement, the current CR and the gay rights movement. The present debate on same-sex marriage is the result of a continuous development of the marriage institution itself. This institution has in turn reflected the changing relationship between the individual and authority (church or state), and the degree of individual autonomy within marriage itself. No-fault divorce laws and the idea of marrying someone of the same sex are products of an increased focus on personal freedoms, whereas newly introduced covenant marriages, accepting limited grounds for divorce, can be read as a backlash from religious traditionalists.

Part 2 shows how the CR's opposition to same-sex marriage can be interpreted as a defence of a certain concept of freedom related to that religious tradition to which the movement belongs. The analysis focuses on the arguments against same-sex marriage as advocated by conservative Christians, by simultaneously illuminating the implicit semantic struggle over freedom. Same-sex marriage is presented as a symptom of a

sick culture, obsessed with personal pleasure, which is threatening the very foundation of society by neglecting core responsibilities tied to being an American citizen. The heterosexual married family is in turn advocated as the prime keeper of traditional moral values. Same-sex marriage will devalue the social benefits of that institution. Finally, gay activists' claims to full citizenship through equal access to marriage, is denied based on a religious set of beliefs, that homosexuality is morally wrong and that same-sex marriage would threaten existing individual liberties such as freedom of religion and expression.

Part 3 focuses on the way CR groups in practical terms have defended their Biblical ideologies (and hereby also their interpretation of American freedom), by discussing three separate discourses in political campaigns against gay rights and same-sex marriage. It will become apparent that evangelical activists from the early movement relied on a demonising discourse, representing especially gay men as predators and child molesters while upholding strong religious rhetoric. Recent campaigns advocating constitutional amendments on state and federal levels, defining marriage as a union of one man and one woman, have instead largely abandoned the previous diabolic discourse. Adopting a pluralist strategy, religious arguments are downplayed in favour of an increasingly secular discourse focusing on traditional libertarian values over morality and sexual identity; a strategy that has proven efficient in gathering support from a wider audience.

Finally, by considering the opposition to same-sex marriage as part of a larger political agenda, Part 4 discusses the CR's relationship with the state at a wider level. Arguing that the United States was founded as a Christian nation, the CR is demanding the state to act as moral authority. The chapter also considers the ambiguous relationship the movement holds with the Republican Party, as state interventionism contradicts the traditional conservative mantra of small government. Whereas the CR has proven itself more than capable of mustering support on an issue-by-issue basis, once the Biblical ideology, on which its political agenda is founded, becomes too visible the broad appeal is likely to suffer substantially. In reality illuminating the greatest challenge to the CR; that despite occasional political setbacks, the courts and regular Americans have in recent generations seemed committed to a secularised and libertarian interpretation of freedom.