

No, No, and Yes — Take Your Choice?

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As widely anticipated, the Conservative branch of American Judaism “settled” the issue of homosexual rabbis and the blessing of same-sex unions by adopting contradictory positions and allowing local synagogues to choose between three options.

The movement’s highest legal body effectively voted to allow the ordination of homosexuals as rabbis and the blessing of homosexual unions. At the same time, the groups also accepted two opinions rejecting the same. Confused?

David Van Biema of *TIME* explains:

Two Jews, three opinions. It’s an old joke, but, as a decision by Judaism’s Conservative branch Wednesday on the explosive topic of gay ordination and gay unions proved, still a valid one. Two slightly differing opinions handed down by Conservatism’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards favored maintaining the branch’s official position forbidding homosexuality. But a third, contradictory opinion, affirmed both gay unions and ordination. And all it took was one out of three to change Conservative history: any rabbi is now free to perform such a union and any seminary to make such a rabbi.

In response, four conservative rabbis resigned from the committee, claiming that the opinion affirming the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions was inconsistent with Jewish law.

The New York Times reported that Rabbi Joel Roth resigned after explaining that the ruling was “outside the pale of halachic [Jewish legal] reasoning.”

More from the *Times*:

With many Protestant denominations divided over homosexuality in recent years, the decision by Conservative Judaism’s leading committee of legal scholars will be read closely by many outside the movement because Conservative Jews say they uphold Jewish law and tradition, which includes biblical injunctions against homosexuality.

The decision is also significant because Conservative Judaism is considered the centrist movement in Judaism, wedged between the liberal Reform and Reconstructionist movements, which have accepted an openly gay clergy for more than 10 years, and the more traditional Orthodox, which rejects it.

The move could create confusion in congregations that are divided over the issue, said Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive director of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, which represents the movement’s more than 750 synagogues with 1.5 million members in North America.

“Most of our congregations will not be of one mind, the same way that we were not of one mind,” said Rabbi Epstein, also a law committee member. “Our mandate is to help congregations deal with this pluralism.”

All this is confusing enough, but take a look at this additional complication:

The ruling accepting gay rabbis is itself a compromise. It favors ordaining gay rabbis and blessing same-sex unions, as long as the men do not practice sodomy.

Committee members said that, in practice, it is a prohibition that will never be policed. The ruling was intended to open the door to gay people while conforming to rabbinic interpretations of the biblical passage in Leviticus which says, "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination."

What this means is that the group allowed an opinion to be adopted that includes a provision they do not intend to enforce in the first place — all in order to allow the ruling to “conform” to the biblical text without actually having to affirm or obey it. Got it?

SEE ALSO: My article, “[Are Yes and No Both ‘Living Options?’ — Not When the Bible Answers the Question,](#)” and Monday’s edition of [The Albert Mohler Program](#).

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