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The GA Permanent Judicial Commission ruled that Presbyterian pastors can perform some same-sex unions provided they are not similar to marriages or called marriages. In response, this year's GA sent to the presbyteries for their vote an amendment to the Book of Order that prohibits ceremonies that approve or bless relationships not in conformity with the constitutional standards for marriage and singleness. This special mailing of *Theology Matters*, underwritten by Presbyterians Together, has been sent to every congregation to help you prepare for the vote in your presbytery. Since a majority of the presbyteries must vote "yes" for the amendment to pass, an abstention is counted the same as a vote against the amendment.

Two Sexes, One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Unions

By Stephen F. Noll

This article is adapted from Dr. Noll's book, *Two Sexes, One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Unions*, published by Latimer Press, 1997, \$10 incl s/h. To order a copy call 1-800-553-3645 or write Latimer Press, P. O. Box 797425, Dallas, TX 75379.

Preface: This is an article about marriage, not about homosexuality. I do not pretend to be an expert on homosexuality. In fact, because of the politicization of the issue, it is hard to distinguish between experts and advocates.¹ What I do wish to do in the current sexuality debate in the churches is to see homoerotic relationships in the mirror of God's will for marriage. For it seems to me that unless one can justify these relationships in terms of marriage, they lose their coherence and even their dignity. We are not talking about the blessing of the hunt but the blessing of a relationship purporting to be "union" of two persons. For this very reason, if these relationships cannot fulfill God's will for marriage, then to place them on an equal footing is to dishonor marriage (Hebrews 13:4).

1. Revising Marriage

Great love stories end with a wedding. The recent Jane Austen revival on TV and screen attests to the enduring attraction of the story of love moving toward its culmination in marriage. This culmination is particularly

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vivid in the final scene of the 1995 BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice*.

The setting is an English parish church. The liturgy is the traditional Prayer Book service. The event is a double wedding between two virtuous sisters, Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, and their hard-won lovers, Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley. As the officiating minister intones the purposes of marriage over the two happy couples, the camera pans all the other couples attending, some of whom we know to be far from happy. It then jumps to the one couple whose licentiousness led to a forced marriage and to the widow whose selfishness has turned her daughter into a loveless spinster. All these configurations of fallen and foolish people are held together by a common understanding that in holy matrimony "a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh."

Now let's stop the videotape and revise the scenario.

It's still a quaint parish church and a liturgy is in use, but it is now the year 2000. It's still a double wedding, but now Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley stand together holding hands, so also Elizabeth and Jane (same-sister marriage? – why not!). The congregation now contains a variety of

couples, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and straight, all of whom have received the Church's blessing of their state of life.

Is this latter scenario possible? Yes and no. Yes, in fact, it already is happening, as can be attested in various media shots of smiling same-sex grooms and brides. But no, it can't really happen, because marriage is God's idea, and God has ordained marriage exclusively for two sexes to be united in one flesh. This is the burden of this essay.

The mainline Protestant churches of the West are in the midst of a worldview war, pitting those who hold to the classic formulations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ against others who wish to "revision" the Gospel in terms of "liberation." The Waterloo of this war is sexuality and the prize revisionists seek is the detaching of God's blessing of sex from its exclusive association with heterosexual marriage. The push to bless same-sex relationships is not therefore an isolated issue. The decision on this issue will signal how the Church defines the Gospel.

Sexuality and the Transformation of Intimacy

Sexuality is a word less than two centuries old. Traditionally, sexuality has been understood in a neutral sense as "the constitutionally bipolar character of human nature," including the *biological duality* of male and female sexes as necessary for reproduction; the *psychological identity* of each person as either a man or a woman; the *erotic longing* of a woman and a man for each other; the *social construction* of gender roles within family and society; and the *sublimation* of erotic love as motive for art, philosophy, and religion.² This definition of sexuality mirrors God's purposes for marriage, because sexuality is a rung in the "ladder of love" that culminates in marriage.

In revisionist parlance, however, sexuality is most often associated not with marriage but with liberation from it. Sociologist Anthony Giddens recently published a history of modern sexuality under the title *The Transformation of Intimacy*.³ Sexuality and intimacy, according to Giddens, are terms that convey a revolutionary new meaning.

- Sexuality in its modern usage means *plastic sexuality*. Giddens does not use "plastic sexuality" as a pejorative term, suggesting artificiality. On the contrary, it represents the emancipated possibilities of sex "severed from its age-old integration with reproduction, kinship and the generations." The two marks of plastic sexuality are female sexual autonomy and the flourishing of homosexuality.
- The advent of plastic sexuality makes possible *confluent love*. Confluent love is an opening of one person to another for the purpose of self-realization and self-enhancement. Specifically, confluent love makes mutual sexual satisfaction the *sine qua non* of an intimate relationship. "Confluent love is active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the 'for ever', 'one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love complex." Whereas romantic love fastens on one

"special person," confluent love is realized in one or more "special relationships."

- The kind of relationship formed by confluent love is termed the *pure relationship*. "In the pure relationship, trust has no external supports and has to be developed on the basis of intimacy." *Intimacy* or *commitment* in this sense, must continually be negotiated in what Giddens calls a "rolling contract." Lest intimacy slide into codependency, partners in a pure relationship must be willing to grow or break apart: "It is a feature of the pure relationship that it can be terminated more or less at will by either partner at any particular point."

Giddens notes that heterosexual marriage has no special claim on love and intimacy as he defines them. In fact, homosexuals are the pioneers of the dawning age of pure relationships, because "in gay relationships, male as well as female, sexuality can be witnessed in its complete separation from reproduction." Speaking as a secular prophet (or pied piper), Giddens observes that traditional marriage has lost its legitimacy and has already decayed into unstable "companionate" relationships based on friendship or utility. He expects these companionate forms to "veer towards the pure relationship, within the life experience of the individual and the society at large." He sees this evolution of marriage both as inevitable and desirable, though he admits that no one knows for the future "if sexual relationships will become a wasteland of impermanent liaisons, marked by emotional antipathy as much as by love and scarred by violence."

Writing in a more popular venue, Tim Stafford describes the same phenomena in our culture as the outworking of a new *ethic of intimacy*.⁴ This ethic includes the following characteristics: an invariably positive view of sex; belief in sex as a private bodily right; a requirement of personal, repeated consent to sex; an ongoing search for "compatibility" among partners; insistence that sex has no necessary consequences; rejection of the double standard on the sexual freedom of men and women; an age of "maturity" (usually age 16) as the doorway to sexual activity.

The ethic of intimacy, Stafford thinks, is the reigning norm among non-Christians and even common among Christians. It is found both among heterosexuals and homosexuals. One major contention of this book is that the concept of same-sex marriage is so bound up with the ethic of intimacy that it cannot be adapted to the requirements of classical Christian marriage. Legitimizing the ethic of intimacy by approving same-sex marriage will further confuse Christians struggling with the allurements of contemporary culture.

Straight Talk about Terms of Endearment

Revisionism begins at the most basic level, by reinterpreting the meaning of words. We live in the Clintonian age, where the question of whether or not sex

is sex depends on what “is” is. When I wrote the book *Two Sexes, One Flesh* in 1997, I was arguing against a resolution before the General Convention of the Episcopal Church which affirmed rites “honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex.” My response to this resolution was as follows:

What kind of *love* are we considering? C. S. Lewis spoke of “Four Loves”: family affection, erotic desire, friendship, and Christian compassion (*agape*). To a Christian coming from another culture or another century, the intended meaning of this Resolution might be obscure. “Perhaps,” she might wonder, “they wish the Church to bless friendship in an age where it has lost its meaning. Maybe they want to commend the fidelity of long-term roommates or the vows of monks and nuns.”

To this stranger, we would have to reply: “The Church is not developing rites to honor the love of friends, companions, or soul-mates, which love has traditionally included an assumption of erotic indifference or a vow of sexual abstinence. No, this Resolution is aiming to legitimize a new relationship that may include friendship, affection, and compassion, but which is constituted by *erotic love and genital acts between two persons....*”

So the Resolution is considering the Church’s institutionalizing of a particular kind of love, namely *the erotic relationship and activity of homosexual lovers*. What will the inclusion of this kind of love mean for the character of marriage? Will it make no difference? The love spoken of in this resolution is, I conclude, more like the “confluent love” characteristic of the ethic of intimacy than the covenant love of the Church’s tradition of marriage.

Fortunately, the resolution failed in 1997, although it is back in 2000 in a different form.

The Episcopal Church, however does not have a corner on slippery language. In Fall 1999, I was invited to give expert testimony in a Presbyterian trial (*Benton v. Presbytery of Hudson River*) on the question of whether a “holy union” and “marriage” were terms of distinction without a difference. The entire case, it seems, centered on what the pastor involved termed “just semantics” and a “shell game.” In 1997, the Presbyterians had passed “Amendment B” to their Constitution, requiring leaders “to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness” (Book of Order G-6.0106b). A subsequent “polity reflection” on this rule drew out the obvious implications: “The plain language excludes covenanting ceremonies or holy unions which are not consistent with this definition.” But wait. The author of the polity reflection, manifesting what literary critics call the intentional fallacy, went on to claim that in his mind holy union ceremonies are “not

included” in the definition of marriage — which means that they are not excluded in practice.

This was the thin semantic reed by which one presbytery permitted “holy union” ceremonies, which the regional church court upheld, and which is now being appealed. My testimony was aimed at clarifying the terminology of “holy union.” Here is an excerpt:

One can *claim* that the terminology of same-sex unions is fundamentally different from that of traditional marriage, but that does not make it so.

The word “union” derives from the biblical definition of marriage: “the two shall become one flesh.” The Westminster Confession defines Christian marriage as a “spiritual and physical *union* of one man and one woman.” Clearly the language of same-sex unions intends to extend the heterosexual marital union to homosexual couples. While I have argued that homosexual “unions” cannot fulfill the design and purposes of marriage, I have no doubt that the language of union is marital language, and that “same-sex marriage” must be included within the Church’s doctrine and discipline of marriage, not some other area.

Furthermore, I believe gay-rights advocates within the Church tacitly admit that this is the case. Let me cite several compelling reasons to think that we are talking about *same-sex marriage*.

- The terminology of love, blessing, holiness and union, as mentioned above, clearly fits the biblical category of holy matrimony as a “two-in-one-flesh” union of persons and clearly implies genital acts between two and only two partners.
- Homosexual advocates have never promoted partnerships on any other model of human relationships, e.g., friendship or kinship relations.
- Proponents of “holy unions” for homosexuals have not asked to have an additional holy union rite for unmarried opposite sex partners, e.g., for a cohabiting man and woman. I presume this is because they believe the marriage is the only Church-approved institution for the sexual union of opposite-sex partners.
- The same-sex rites and ceremonies that have been devised all mirror the marriage service and use marital language and not some other known rite, e.g., commissioning for service.
- Advocates of same-sex unions assume that same-sex couples should possess identical rights and privileges of married couples, including the right to adopt children.
- The debate in the broader culture is carried out in terms of “same-sex marriage.”
- If same-sex marriage is legalized in one of the States, couples who have participated in a “holy union”

ceremony will surely seek to have their unions recognized legally as marriage.

I titled the first chapter of my book, “What Are We Talking About?” and concluded that we are talking about *marriage, same-sex marriage*. Therefore I do not think a mere change of terminology avoids the reality that the Church’s understanding of marriage is being changed.

Conclusion

Marriage cannot serve two masters. According to its historic definition, marriage cannot accommodate same-sex unions. In following what I have described as the ethic of intimacy, neither heterosexual nor homosexual relationships will manifest the same kind of love and commitment that characterize traditional marriage – and these relationships cannot be blessed by God because they are contrary to his express will for human sexuality.

The challenge to clarify the meaning of marriage carries with it a potential for renewal. It should lead us back to the fundamental question: *what is the Church’s doctrine of marriage?* This is the question the Church must decide *before* it begins authorizing alternative forms. If the definition of marriage should be revised, then church bodies should not hide behind cleverly worded definitions or vaguely worded resolutions but should spell out the full implications of their new position.

2. Thinking Biblically about Marriage

By grounding marriage in the creation purposes of God, the Bible views it as an institution ordained by God for all people and not as a special revelation for Jews and Christians only. At the same time, Jews look to the Torah and Christians to the Old and New Testaments to constitute their own understanding and to clarify secular understandings. Until very recently, Jews and Christians almost universally would have found the idea of same-sex marriage unthinkable. It simply would not fit their understanding of the biblical worldview. In this section, I shall argue first that although there is no text that says “No same-sex marriage,” the Bible does present marriage in a form incompatible with homosexual unions and with an underlying moral principle that is not susceptible to revision.

The Argument from Silence

“The Bible has nothing to say about same-sex marriage. No single text can be adduced to prohibit or endorse such a practice.” This observation, while technically correct, is superficial and deceptive, as the general moral principles of the Bible lead clearly to the proscription of same-sex marriage. This is the way the Church has *consistently (though often tacitly)* interpreted the Spirit’s voice speaking through Scripture.

Sounds of Silence

The force of an argument from silence depends very much on the subject matter involved. Scripture, for instance, has nothing to say about lovemaking techniques. Neither does it speak about artificial contraception. Nor about wife-beating. Each of these issues needs to be judged by the plain sense and the whole context of Scripture. In the case of same-sex marriage, the moral logic of prohibition goes like this:

1. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, defines marriage essentially as a monogamous union of man and woman, and without exception condemns non-marital sexual acts as immoral (Genesis 2:25; Deuteronomy 22:28-29; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
2. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, consistently declares that homosexual acts are unnatural, illegal, and immoral (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:18-32).
3. Therefore, according to biblical norms, same-sex marriage is impossible and same-sex activity immoral.

The total absence of any treatment of same-sex marriage in the Bible *confirms* its impossibility as a Christian option, rather than opening it for dialogue.

No Wholesome Examples

The Bible communicates its worldview not only by propositions but by examples. The Bible gives no examples of erotic love between persons of the same sex at all. Homosexual advocates have tried to enroll David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi as same-sex models. These examples actually hurt the case for same-sex marriage by showing the depth and variety of non-erotic loves possible outside marriage. David and Jonathan are two married men who are strong friends, not “lovers”; and Ruth is a woman who risks her reputation in order to preserve the family line of her husband and mother-in-law.

The Bible is not reluctant to show a variety of heterosexual marriages, which are hardly the stereotypical “Ozzie and Harriet” relationships. Strong, godly wives are found from Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, down to Elizabeth, Priscilla and Eunice. Corrupt couples from Samson and Delilah to Ananias and Sapphira are also noted. Scripture gives examples of couples like Hannah and Elkanah, and Zechariah and Elizabeth, who experience childlessness as a loss without in any way delegitimizing their marriages. Finally, the Bible commends examples of men and women who respond to a call to single abstinence or to the circumstances of widowhood: Deborah, Jeremiah, Paul, and Lydia. But *despite this variety, the Bible does not even hint at the possibility that a formal marriage between people of the same sex could serve as a model, good or bad.*

Jesus' Implicit Teaching on Same-Sex Marriage

Jesus himself said nothing explicitly on the subject. This is not surprising, given the fact that no one in first century Judaism was even dreaming of such an innovation. Nevertheless, Jesus set out for his disciples a method of working from the general and original principles of God to particular issues. Specifically, Jesus' way of answering the Pharisees about divorce forms a close analogy with our contemporary dispute.

And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." (Mark 10:2-4)

Jewish tradition had come to regard the "Mosaic exception" (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) as a legal principle allowing divorce at the will of the husband. Jesus refuses to accept the exception as a rule:

"For your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." (Mark 10:5-9)

Jesus' reply to the Pharisees moves logically from premise to conclusion:

1. He grounds the two-sexes-in-one-flesh institution of marriage in God's original creation and thus in his changeless will for human fulfillment.
2. He reminds them that the Mosaic exception was a concession to sin, hardly justifying indiscriminate use.
3. He argues that since the marriage bond is God's institution prior to the Law, it is not subject to mere legal dissolution.
4. Basing his teaching on the unchangeable character of marriage, he forbids divorce to his disciples.

The setting of this passage in Matthew's Gospel suggests that the apostolic Church pondered carefully the implications of Jesus' marriage teaching. First of all, the apostles understood marital fidelity to be a challenge to a "higher righteousness" equivalent to the call to lifelong celibacy (Matthew 19:10-12). Secondly, they distinguished between the absolute form of Jesus' prohibition of divorce and the pastoral truth that "unchastity" breaks the marriage bond (Matthew 19:9). Thus they allowed separation or divorce in some circumstances. Finally, they understood Jesus' principle of two-sexes-in-one-flesh as abolishing polygamy, concubinage, and levirate marriage, even as Judaism continued to tolerate them (cf. Matthew 22:23-33).

The Pharisees posed the question whether one man could be married to two women. Today homosexual advocates ask: "Is it legitimate for a man to marry a man, or a woman to marry a woman for any cause?" Could we not formulate the Lord's reply by analogy with his reply to the Pharisees?

"Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them *male and female*, and said, 'For this reason a *man* shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his *wife*, and the two shall become one flesh'? *So they who become one flesh are two sexes, male and female. Since therefore God has united distinct sexes, let no one unite the same sexes.*"

Can Biblical Sexual Norms Be Revised?

If it can be established that the Bible, reasonably construed, prohibits same-sex marriage, does this settle the question? What kind of authority does the Bible have over the Church's moral teaching?

The Sources of Biblical Authority

Reformation confessions uniformly affirm the authority of the Bible as the "Word of God Written." The Westminster Larger Catechism, for instance, states that "the Scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God." To be sure, the catechism also speaks of the role of the "Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures," but this witness involves confirmation and illumination of God's truth, not new revelation. So when the Westminster Confession declares marriage to be "spiritual and physical union of one man and one woman," it is presuming that this is the clear and uncontrovertible teaching of Scripture.

Revising Biblical Authority

Revisionists begin from the assumption that "the Bible has since the eighteenth century been dethroned as a document of propositional authority."⁵ The Bible, they contend, contains religious insights and metaphors, some good and some bad, strung together in a story or "narrative." The core authority of this story lies in its testimony to human liberation and the evolution of religious consciousness modeled on the radical spirituality of Jesus. Given the vast diversity of historical contexts and theological viewpoints found in the Bible, the idea of "proving" doctrine or establishing moral norms directly from specific texts of Scripture is, according to revisionists, at best naive and at worst fundamentalistic.

Abstracting Form from Content

Contemporary revisionists employ several strategies in vitiating the plain sense of Scripture about homosexuality. One way is to divorce general concepts from the concrete biblical forms in which these concepts appear. William Countryman, for instance, in his oft-cited book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*, consistently distinguishes abstractions like purity, property, or inclusivism from their embodiment in specific teaching. He concludes that Jesus

has abolished the purity code by declaring all things clean (cf. Mark 7:15). Hence, Countryman opines, “the gospel allows no rule against the following, in and of themselves: masturbation, nonvaginal heterosexual intercourse, bestiality, polygamy, homosexual acts, or erotic art and literature” despite many specific texts to the contrary.⁶

Another way of divorcing form and content is by *proof-analogies* (to coin a phrase). Revisionists frequently connect the decision of the Jerusalem Council to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15) with deliberate departures from Scripture and tradition by the contemporary Church.⁷ Once again, the analogy is merely formal. The Jerusalem Council did not deliberately depart from Scripture but became convinced that Paul’s call and ministry fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies (Acts 15:15-18).⁸

The Slavery-Women-Gays Analogy

The proof-analogy of “slavery-women-gays” is cited by many today as if it were virtually canonical. According to this analogy, the Church gradually came to see the evil of racism, then of sexism, and finally of heterosexism. The problem with the slavery-women-gays analogy is that it mixes very different institutions and practices and makes a number of unwarranted claims about what the Bible teaches.

- The Bible treats *slavery* as an evil, sometimes necessarily to be endured, but never endorses it as God’s good will for human beings (Leviticus 25:39-40; cf. Esther 7:4; Philemon 16).
- The relationship of *women* and men is more complex. Marriage participates both in the original creation order and in the fallen order of sin where the husband “rules over” the wife. In contrast to slavery and certainly homosexuality, Scripture consistently commends the created structure of heterosexual marriage, even as the New Testament offers a vision of male and female redeemed in Christ (Hebrews 13:4; Ephesians 5:21-33).
- *Homosexuality* is treated in Scripture as a disordered orientation to the Creator and creation, and both homosexual and heterosexual fornication are considered immoral acts. The Gospel offers forgiveness to all who repent of immoral acts and who wrestle with the “sin that dwells within us” (Romans 7:17-23). But nowhere does Scripture give the slightest hint that the Gospel offered freely to Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, can legitimate a sexual relationship outside of heterosexual marriage.

The slavery-women-gays analogy is logically strained and is used more as a rhetorical weapon than a serious argument. Nevertheless, the analogy is an indicator of the difference between those who view the Gospel as an abstract principle of liberation and those who define liberation in terms the Bible itself specifies, i.e., the redemption of sinners through the atoning death of Jesus

Christ on the Cross, and the restoration and transformation of the original creation order in Christ.

Rejecting Biblical Authority

While some revisionist scholars try to accommodate biblical teaching to their foregone conclusions, other scholars take the more direct approach of rejecting biblical authority entirely. This approach is strikingly illustrated in a series of quotations by Presbyterian scholars and seminary professors writing in response to the 1993 call of the General Assembly for dialogue on sexuality:⁹

It must be admitted that the standard biblical texts – seven in all – that either mention or may allude to homosexual practice are uniformly negative about it. In this negativity they reflect the heterosexist bias prevalent in the ancient Near East. Christian ethical decisions cannot, however, rest on those seven texts.... (Choon Leong-Seow, page 26)

On a fundamental level... the Old and the New Testaments have a common assumption about marriage and society. Both operate on the assumptions that persons draw their fundamental societal identity as members of a family... If this is, broadly speaking, the biblical perspective on social institutions, it differs markedly from a dominant perspective of modernity. The option to return to preindustrial, patriarchal societal norms is neither viable nor desirable for modern communities of faith... (J. Andrew Dearman, page 64)

My goal is not to deny that Paul condemned homosexual acts but to highlight the ideological contexts in which such discussions have taken place. My goal is to dispute appeals to “what the Bible says” as a foundation for Christian ethical arguments. It really is time to cut the Gordian knot of fundamentalism. (Dale B. Martin, page 130)

What is common to all these statements is a tacit admission that the Bible says one thing, but contemporary Christians cannot responsibly choose to accept its plain teaching. Such an attitude strains the name of “exegesis,” as it denies even as it expounds.

Conclusion

“Two sexes, one flesh” is the clear teaching of the Bible and our Lord himself, in matters of human sexuality. But does that matter? We have traced two very different attitudes toward biblical authority. One attitude seeks to understand and *obey* the Bible as God’s word to his people yesterday, today, and forever. The other attitude finds the biblical worldview embarrassing and offensive and seeks to *salvage* the Bible by radically reinterpreting it or simply calling it wrong. The issue of same-sex marriage poses one of the clearest examples of this clash of attitudes. Only the most strained exegesis and argumentation can lead one to conclude that the biblical

authors would permit, much less endorse, same-sex marriage. If the leaders of the Church cannot say No to this clear contradiction of biblical norms, then it is hard to believe they will ever be able to use the Bible credibly in any moral decision-making.

3. The Natural Design of Marriage

Cultures and religions throughout history have recognized various forms of marriage. Same-sex marriage has not been one of them. Nor *can* it be. By setting forth the nature of marriage, I hope to show why homosexuals in partnerships cannot fulfill their own aims and hopes that their unions can truly be marriage.

This chapter looks at marriage in terms of its natural character as a creation ordinance and a universal fact of human society. The Bible begins at this very point in the first three chapters of Genesis, where God creates the human race male and female, ordains the marital bond of man and woman, and continues to provide for their relationship after sin has entered in and distorted it. The two-sexes-in-one-flesh character of marriage is presupposed and necessary at every stage of God's original design and the subsequent history of his dealings with the human race.

The Purposes of Marriage

One of the contributions of my Anglican tradition is the beautiful marriage service of the Book of Common Prayer, authored by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. The preface to this service enumerates the "causes" or purposes of marriage as found in Scripture and particularly the Genesis account.

First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.

Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

In contemporary parlance, we can speak of these "goods" of marriage as the *biological*, the *erotic*, and the *social* purposes. I shall argue that each of these goods can only be fully experienced in the bodily union of a man and a woman and that they cohere as a full expression of human nature only in the institution of lifelong heterosexual marriage.

The Biological Purpose (Genesis 1:26-28)

The first creation story looks at the creation generically, with each creature in its proper place and each living creature reproducing "according to its kind." The story comes to a climax with the creation of a new species: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This new race has a two-in-one character, one humanity in two sexes, and its primary task is reproduction: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"

The first humble purpose of marriage is, simply, the survival and flourishing of the human race. This is the evolutionary success story the biologists tell of the human sperm uniting with an unlike egg, with its XX and XY chromosomes coming to reproduce distinct personalities within the immutable two-gender plan. It is the story anthropologists tell of hormones and instincts that have led males for millennia to search out desirable females, and females to attach these males to themselves and their offspring. It is the origin of the hope of having descendants and the instinctive and visceral pride of mother and father in saying: "this is our own child."

Whatever else marriage is, it begins with a biological drive, which is then crowned by divine blessing. The two-in-oneness of marriage turns necessity into a gift, if we have hearts to receive it as such. Ethicist Oliver O'Donovan expresses the spiritual dimension of the biological purpose in this way:

Human beings come into existence with a dimorphically differentiated sexuality, clearly ordered at the biological level towards heterosexual union as the human mode of procreation. It is not possible to negotiate this fact about our common humanity; it can only be either welcomed or resented. Marriage, precisely by being ordered around this fact, enables us to welcome it and to acknowledge it as a part of God's creational gift.... What marriage can do, which other relationships cannot do, is to disclose the goodness of biological nature by elevating it to its teleological fulfillment in personal relationship."¹⁰

The Erotic Purpose (Genesis 2:23)

The second creation account is much more personal. Its drama begins with the man (Adam) and God's observation that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Then follows an odd courtship ritual in which the human animal rejects all other animal flesh as fitting his desire. At the climax of the second story, God builds from Adam's own rib a "helper according to his opposite" (Hebrew *'ezer k'neg'do*). Seeing the woman, the man exclaims: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This response is not only a mental recognition of *another* human being but of the longed-for *complement*. From this recognition flows marital eros, echoed later by the lovers of the Song of Songs 2:16: "My beloved is mine and I am his."

Marriage is a union of flesh and bones. Specifically, it is the yearning the male senses for the female form, and the female receiving and returning those attentions. It is a matter of male and female members uniting to make what Shakespeare comically called “the beast with two backs.” The physicality of sexual desire is a warning sign that in itself sex has no obvious or inherent spiritual significance. The desire of the flesh is for this world, participating in “life under the sun.” It includes all the pleasurable activities of the human soul: the arts, wisdom, and love. The Preacher’s counsel to “enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life” (Ecclesiastes 9:9) is of a piece with the claim that “love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave....” (Song of Songs 8:6).

It may seem demeaning when the Book of Common Prayer speaks of marriage as “a remedy against sin, to avoid fornication.” Of course, it is addressing the *fallen* desires of humanity, but even in its unfallen state eros is meant to be *exclusive*. As the philosopher Roger Scruton observes: “Sexual desire is itself inherently ‘nuptial’: it involves concentration upon the embodied existence of the other, leading through tenderness to the ‘vow’ of erotic love.”¹¹ Thus jealousy is a threat and chastity a project for men and women not only before marriage but in marriage as well. The threat of adultery reminds us that married couples are not held together by some iron hand of biology; rather, they participate in a human drama, which has tragic dangers but may also lead to victory over sin and healing in life.

The Social Purpose (Genesis 2:24)

The Paradise story concludes with the public institution of marriage: “Therefore a man shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife.” Marriage is the personal and historical crossroads of the love of man and woman and the love of parents and children. The verse also introduces a motif of tension, even potential tragedy. Children will leave parents and become husband and wife, whose children will leave them.

While marriage may be preceded by erotic courtship and fulfilled in sexual delight, the union of man and woman brings about a new reality, a society. In his “Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer states: “In his unfathomable condescension God does add his ‘Yes’ to yours; but by doing so, he creates out of your love something quite new – the holy estate of matrimony.”¹² This new society has a home base, captured again in the Anglican marriage prayer for the couple “that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace.” The home is the place where the biological drive to procreate children finds its fulfillment in their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

The Essential Nature of Marriage

Jesus draws from the creation texts a central principle: “the two will become one flesh” (Matthew 19:5; Genesis 2:24). By this he clearly meant the two opposite sexes

joined in one physical union. Like all Jews, Jesus grounded his understanding of marriage in creation; however, while Jews (like Roman Catholics after them) saw descendants as the main outcome of marriage, Jesus drew attention to the coming into being of a spiritual union of husband and wife. God has put something together, he says, which man *cannot* put asunder.

The *two-sexes-in-one-flesh communion of man and woman* gathers together the three subsidiary purposes of marriage into one “intrinsic good.” One cannot see or demonstrate the essence or intrinsic good of something, the “roseness of a rose,” but that does not mean it does not exist. It was the error of earlier “natural law” teaching to see procreation as the obvious *essence* of marriage, thus making the marital relationship and act instrumental to the end of procreation. Recent Roman Catholic theologians have corrected this error while upholding the basic natural law tradition. According to Germain Grisez, “marriage and the marital act are not merely instrumental goods. Marriage is an intrinsically good communion of spouses, constituted by their mutual self-gift, and each marriage has this character from the moment the couple marry and begin to live together.”¹³

Given the essence and purposes of marriage, one cannot help but make distinctions between what fulfills this character and what does not.

1. First of all, marriages may be *deficient* in terms of the God-given purposes and still be a true marriage. A barren couple, or a couple separated for years against their will, have a real but deficient marriage. To say these marriages are deficient is not to imply that they are morally inferior; indeed many such couples surpass their peers by becoming fathers and mothers by legal adoption and by spiritual adoption of others who are poor and needy.
2. *Variations* exist in the pattern of marriage found in human history. Some variations are morally neutral, such as interracial marriage; some may be morally dubious, such as the marriage of an octogenarian to a teenager; others, like polygamy, are morally wrong for Christians at least.
3. Some non-marital relationships have the *potential* to become marriages. A man and woman are not married simply by having sex together, even though their souls may be marked indelibly through the union of the flesh. If the couple accepts the full meaning and purposes of their union and lives it over a number of years, their “common law” marriage may be recognized as irregular but real. In this case, both state and Church seek to have these irregular relationships publicly recognized.
4. Some relationships – and this includes homosexual partnerships – are simply *contrary* to the essence of marriage. Unlike heterosexual relationships, they do

not have the potential to fulfill the design purposes of marriage. Thus formal recognition cannot change their ontological status. Two lesbians who arrange for one partner to bear a child, engage in physical acts of love, and are recognized as a family in their community, will still not be married. Appearances notwithstanding, the two cannot be one flesh because God has provided only one design for the union of persons.

Human nature and society are, like the human body, malleable but not infinitely so. The same is true of marriage: it comes in many shapes and forms, but this fact does not mean that it can be made into something it isn't. This is why the Church *cannot* bless same-sex marriage.

Marriage Under the Power of Sin and Death

The early chapters of Genesis depict marriage not only as a good and natural institution created by God, but as fallen under the power of sin and death. The third and fourth chapters of Genesis are not only an account of the Fall of human nature but the fall of human marriage. Marriage in its several purposes is infected by sin.

Biologically, the “evil imagination” of the human heart is passed on from generation to generation. The Genesis account makes the point that Adam knew Eve and she conceived a son only *after* the Fall. Original sin is a spiritual condition, linked inextricably to our physical nature: “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men in that all sinned.” (Romans 5:12). The pain of childbirth (Genesis 3:16) becomes a symbol that the family is a broken society where sin and death reign.

Erotically, the Fall distorts the relational life of man and woman. Reaching for fig leaves, Adam and Eve abandon any illusions about uninhibited sexuality. Guilty shame becomes a necessary component of sexual modesty.¹⁴ By confining desire to the family (“your desire will be to your husband...”), God seals off sexualized mythology, erotic art, and cult prostitution as quests for meaning.

Socially, God also seals off the lonely man's tendency toward wanderlust and binds him to one wife and family. The curse of Genesis 3:16 means marriage will become at best a benevolent monarchy, at worst a tyranny (“...and he shall rule over you”). The relations of parents and children become an occasion for envy and murder in Genesis 4. Cain goes on to found the first city, where family rivalries must be restrained by law.

Despite the deformation caused by sin, marriage retains its essence and purposes. Even in a polygamous union, the principle of two-sexes-in-one-flesh union of man and woman is preserved: each coupling of husband and wives is separate with distinct offspring. In the case of a barren couple, the procreative purpose is frustrated, but God may always “open the womb.” Even with divorce, the Law

insists that one marriage must be formally broken (and not renewed) when a second is instituted.

Homosexuality and the Natural Purposes of Marriage

Homosexual relationships are not only inconsistent with the primal “two-sexes-in-one-flesh” principle of creation, but they frustrate the three subsidiary purposes of marriage as well. The contrary character of homosexual love, most obvious with regard to procreation, is less obvious in the other two purposes. Homosexual couples can desire each other and engage in genital acts, and they can set up house. But even in these latter purposes, there are indications that appearance and reality are not one and the same.

Homosexuality against Biology

Biologically, nature expresses the two-sexes-in-one-flesh principle. *Homo sapiens* is a sexually bipolar species. Nature has made no provision for same-sex gametes to fertilize each other. No homosexual act has ever produced a child. Any evolutionary tendency to homosexuality would be quickly frustrated by the non-reproductivity inherent in the trait. Male and female bodies are made for sexual intercourse, whereas same-sex partners can only simulate coitus. Monogamous sex is the safest and healthiest sex, whereas all other kinds of promiscuous and non-vaginal sex bring with them much higher health risks. These facts of life constitute the most obvious reason that homosexuality has been considered to involve abnormal and high-risk behavior.

Desire for the Truly Other

Erotically, biological realities control the direction of desire. The difference in male and female hormones dictates that males and females will look sexually distinct and identify the opposite sex as distinctly beautiful. The question of whether biology is destiny and whether some persons are naturally oriented as homosexuals is, as we know, a major area of dispute today.¹⁵ The Bible, to begin with, does not give any support for the idea that God created some people naturally to desire others of the same sex.

The biblical view is supported by the aggregate experience of the human race, as studied by anthropologists and sociologists. Their studies have uncovered no fixed form of homosexual desire that compares with the love of married partners. Sometimes homosexual activities mimic marital relations. Egalitarian homosexuality requires one partner to play the role of the opposite sex and, in some cases, to conceive of the other partner as being the opposite sex. This role-playing phenomenon helps explain the *berdache* custom of American Indians and transsexualism and transgender identification.

Philosophically, homosexual desire must also be seen to be derivative and distorted. The contemporary philosopher

Roger Scruton, without relying explicitly on biblical norms or commands, concludes that an essential feature of mature sexual desire is “the opening of the self to the mystery of another gender”:

Desire directed toward the other gender elicits not its simulacrum but its complement. Male desire evokes the loyalty which neutralises its vagrant impulse; female desire evokes the conquering urge which overcomes its hesitations. Often, of course, this complementarity can be re-created, either momentarily, in play, or permanently, by members of the same sex.¹⁶

To say that complementary desire can be “re-created,” however, admits a fundamental difference between a natural and an artificial impulse.

Homosexuality without Marriage

Socially, the artificiality of homosexual relationships is reflected in their non-institutional status. What is most striking in an anthropological survey of sexuality is the occurrence of homosexual practices *and* the absence of a homosexual marriage institution.¹⁷ This phenomenon is explained in part because much ancient homosexuality was practiced between elders and youths, or between male couples and female couples who had no opportunity for heterosexual relationships. The male *berdache* who put on squaw’s clothing and played the role of a female could in some societies be treated as married, though many *berdaches* had specialized roles as priests and shamans. Transgendered homosexuality, as this has been called, is the exception that proves the rule: same-sex unions were accepted only insofar as they simulated heterosexual marriage.

Conclusion

Homosexual relationships, even in those cases where they are exclusive and long-term, frustrate the natural design of marriage and fail to fulfill its purposes. These natural purposes are derived from the essence of marriage as a two-sexes-in-one-flesh communion of a man and a woman. Marriage is natural in two senses: it is universally found in human societies, although frequently deficient and deformed; and it is the final cause or goal toward which all biological, erotic, and social relationships of men and women tend. There are other intimate love relationships among human beings, such as friendship and family affection, but these are neither sexual nor are they institutionalized in marriage. Homoerotic relationships, however, are *contrary* to nature, which explains the strength of the taboo which many people feel toward homosexuals. This taboo may be distorted by sin into hatred and violence, but it is not in itself irrational but rather based in a natural intuition.

4. Marriage and the Law

Marriage and its purposes derive from the original design of the Creator. This design is mediated and regulated in a fallen world through the various institutions of human law. The Church, as the guardian of Holy Scripture, and the State as the enforcer of law, have always had a joint interest in the oversight of marriage. In the West since the age of Constantine, civil society, i.e., the everyday life of citizens, has reflected the dual influence of Christian and secular traditions of marriage and family.

In this section, I shall consider the legitimacy of same-sex marriage as a matter of law. My particular thesis is that same-sex marriage, by its very ideology, is incapable of forming the basis of a new social order, Christian or secular. If institutionalized, same-sex marriage will only further corrode the place of marriage in contemporary society, and the whole liberationist project of which it is a part will eventually come to grief. For the Church to collaborate in this Babel-like experiment involves a tragic abandonment of its true prophetic responsibility to give moral guidance to the secular regime.

Same-Sex Marriage and the Traditions of Justice

To the question, “Is same-sex marriage a justice issue?” one may reply: “Whose justice?” and “By which rationality?”¹⁸ Without agreeing finally with Alasdair MacIntyre that moral and political discourse is utterly tradition-bound, I would insist that any claim to justice must be rooted in a coherent and historically tested worldview. Marriage has coexisted with three Western traditions of justice: the Law of the Hebrew Bible and Judaism, the law proceeding from classical political thought, and modern law proceeding from natural rights theory. Same-sex marriage is an experiment emerging from contemporary liberationism and its “ethic of intimacy.” Liberationism has no historical track record of safeguarding marriage, and indeed it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the push for same-sex marriage is part of a larger project to subvert marriage as it is known in the other traditions.

The Law of Moses: Putting Sexuality behind the Veil

St. Paul calls the Law a guardian for faith (Galatians 3:24); likewise marriage among the Jewish people served as a guardian of the good things of the Law. The First and Tenth Commandments frame the Law with two absolute prohibitions: against worshipping false gods (false religion) and coveting one’s neighbor’s spouse (false sexuality). The great danger of sexual desire, according to Genesis 3, is its pretension to transcendence: “you shall become like gods.” The world of Israel’s neighbors was filled with myths of gods and goddesses cavorting with each other. The central practices of fertility religion sought to manipulate the forces of the divine realm via sexual energy and were continuations of a prehistoric

superstition supposing that spirituality could be communicated mechanically by means of the male's vital semen.

The advent of the biblical worldview constitutes an historic change, what one writer calls "Judaism's Sexual Revolution," which has spread throughout the world wherever monotheism has been established:

When Judaism demanded that all sexual activity be channeled into marriage, it changed the world. The Torah's prohibition of non-marital sex quite simply made the creation of Western civilization possible.... This revolution consisted in forcing the sexual genie into the marital bottle. It ensured that sex no longer dominated society, heightened male-female love and sexuality (and thereby almost alone created the possibility of love and eroticism within marriage), and began the arduous task of elevating the status of women.¹⁹

The laws against homosexuality are to be understood as part of the biblical refusal to mix sexuality and spirituality. Thus St. Paul spoke as a true son of Israel when he linked together false religion and false sexuality (Romans 1:18-32).

The Classical Tradition: Family and City

It is no secret that many Greeks engaged in homosexual acts, usually between older married men and male youths, but nowhere in the corpus of classical philosophy is same-sex marriage seen as an implication of justice. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates leads his youthful inquirers to consider whether the most just regime *in the abstract* requires heterosexual communism, where women and men share all things in common, including children. He concludes, however, that the justice of such a regime is more a matter of speech than reality. In his concrete teaching on justice (*Laws*), Plato condemns the practice of homosexuality and affirms a private sphere for the family.

Aristotle argues that while the family is the original and necessary unit of civil society, human nature reaches its perfection in the city. The delicate interaction between private life and public life as joint schools for virtue is expressed in this way by a modern-day Aristotelian:

Marriage, like every worthwhile institution, is also a tradition – a smooth handle on experience, which has been passed on from generation to generation, and in the passing, slowly worn itself into the shape required by human nature. It has a story attached to it: its comic and tragic aspects are a familiar part of popular culture; its hardships and joys can be anticipated and also shared; it has the respect and the understanding of others. Moreover, it translates itself into legal forms, and endeavours to reconstitute as legal rights the many and mysterious obligations which arise from domestic proximity.²⁰

While homosexuals may exhibit truly noble friendship for one another and compassionate care for unrelated persons, they cannot produce the complex intergenerational reality of marriage and family as a societal unit. There simply is no role in the tradition for same-sex couples.

The Modern Natural Rights Tradition

Modern political philosophy is founded on the idea that individuals enter into political society by means of a social contract, in which they cede control to the state in return for protection of person and property. John Locke can thus regard marriage as a "voluntary compact between Man and Woman" rather than a divine institution.²¹ Locke replaces the divine institution with the law of Nature's God, which he sees as the natural instinctual affection of man and woman and their desire to reproduce themselves. Locke's theory may indeed justify the state's *regulation* of marriage contracts, e.g., age of consent and conditions for divorce; but it does not mean that the state can alter the fundamental biological requirement that it is a man and woman who make a marriage.

Likewise Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that the family is the only natural unit of society, and he made *vive la différence* the charter of the husband-wife relationship: "In everything not connected with sex, woman is man.... In everything connected with sex, woman and man are in every respect related and in every respect different." Because of the natural complementarity of the sexes, "each contributes equally to the common aim, but not in the same way."²² For Rousseau, marriage is the tiny society in which the lonely individual can overcome selfishness by falling passionately in love with someone different from himself.

American political sensibility is a marriage of Locke and Rousseau, of pragmatism and sentimentality. Alexis de Tocqueville commended American democracy on its accommodation of egalitarianism to the structures of family life: "The Americans have applied to the sexes the great principle of economy which governs the manufactures of our age, by carefully dividing the duties of man from those of woman, in order that the great work of society may be carried on."²³

A century and a half later, sociologists Brigitte and Peter Berger defended this tradition, stating that "*the family, and specifically the bourgeois family* [i.e. father, mother, children], *is the necessary social context for the emergence of the autonomous individuals who are the empirical foundation of political democracy.*"²⁴ The tradition has been upheld consistently by the courts. Justice Douglas, for instance, in nullifying a law allowing sterilization of criminals (*Skinner v. Oklahoma*), argued that "we are dealing here with legislation which involves one of the basic rights of man. Marriage and procreation are fundamental to the very existence and survival of the race."

The natural rights tradition is not sufficient to assure a Christian understanding of marriage; in fact, it needs the religious doctrine to create a moral climate in which rights will be responsibly exercised. The tradition has shown itself compatible with Christian marriage. For two centuries, the Christian ideal of marriage has been upheld in the United States by public consent and legal sanction, and clergy have functioned as ministers of the state as well as the Church in performing ceremonies.

Liberationism as the Context of Same-Sex Marriage

The public and political movement to normalize homosexuality has a direct tie to the sexual liberation ideology which I have characterized as the ethic of intimacy. While the sexual liberation movement uses the language of rights, it draws on an analysis of society much more dependent on Marx and Engels, for whom the bourgeois family was an economic unit of history that was passing away, and Freud, who declared that monogamous marriage “cuts off a fair number of people from enjoyment and becomes the source of serious injustice.”²⁵

The liberationist project begins with a *deconstruction* of traditional institutions as inherently oppressive. If slavery has oppressed blacks and capitalism oppressed workers, so also marriage has oppressed women. From this deconstruction flows feminist theologian Carter Heyward’s “healing commitment not to grant coupling or heterosexual marriage a privileged social status apart from other forms of relational commitment.”²⁶ Liberationists then proceed to a *reconstruction* of consciousness in which the *person* is radically self-defining, with the right “to explore the character of the erotic as sacred power.”

The debate among gay-rights advocates over same-sex marriage is poised between the deconstructive and reconstructive moments of liberation thought and politics. The deconstructionists fear that marriage may co-opt the liberation movement, while reconstructionists argue that same-sex marriage may serve as a means by which the entire institution may be redefined in terms of “families we choose.”²⁷

The \$64,000 question is, what would the institutionalizing of “families we choose” do to our society’s commitment to lifelong, monogamous marriage? The emphasis on “choice” differentiates the sexual liberationist from the natural rights tradition. In the latter, “rights” are conditioned by nature and binding contract; but to the liberationist, nature is itself an oppressive construct, and the untrammled self reigns supreme.

Redefining the Rules of Marriage

In the past, U.S. marriage law has provided the outer bounds of the institution (e.g., marriage and divorce regulations) while relying on religious teaching to define its inner character. But if the institution of marriage, for

the first time in history, must redefine its opposite-sex character under the influence of a neopagan ideology, why should we not expect that it will be asked to redefine other aspects of its identity? This problem leads to questions in the three areas of *lifelong commitment*, *sexual chastity*, and *normativity*.

First of all, marriage in the Christian tradition has always been a *lifelong* commitment, and most secular marriages also use “till death do us part” language. Some gay advocates also define marriage as “an emotional commitment of two people for life.” Others, however, argue that marriage vows should be “so long as love shall last.” Why should a homosexual remain in a lifelong marriage if the emotion is drained from the commitment, especially when the interests of children are not involved? Secondly, Christian marriage has always been seen as requiring *chastity*. Married partners remain chaste by maintaining exclusive sexual fidelity to the other partner; unmarried chastity involves abstinence from sex before marriage or outside marriage. Some proponents of same-sex marriage, like Bishop John Spong, are also pushing for non-marital sexual arrangements; others suggest that same-sex desire makes the “need for extramarital outlets” more acceptable for all married partners, gay and straight.²⁸

Finally, marriage has held a *normative status* in society, both in public morals and in legal preferences. Mores, morals, and laws work together to promote virtue in a healthy society, and the Church has served society by giving theological justification for its moral norms. Morality must not only identify virtuous arrangements but disapprove violations of the norm through public shame.

One would think that the state and the Church would insist on coherent, agreed-upon answers to the questions of permanence, exclusivity, and normativity before jumping into the liberationist marriage project. But the debate goes on among liberationists themselves on these basic issues. The unsettled character of the discussion is no accident but is inherent in the very self-defining character of the ethic of intimacy.

Conclusion

The state and the Church both have a role and a stake in maintaining marriage as a two-sexes-in-one-flesh union of man and woman. The secular regime works from its own lights to establish the natural design of marriage for the sake of generational continuity and social stability. The Church grounds the institution in its understanding of God as Creator and Lawgiver and of the sacred nature of the marital union. The cooperation of natural, legal, and spiritual authorities means that heterosexual marriage has been a central institution in all civil societies, even though the particular form of marriage in any one society and the individual marriages within it have not always been just or happy.

The sexual revolution's assault on the barricades of tradition includes an attack on the justice of marriage. Liberationists accuse marriage of being unjust because it does not include same-sex partners. They claim to find in the natural rights tradition a "right to marry," which if translated into law, would force all states to put same-sex marriage on an equal footing with traditional marriage, thus diluting or dissolving marriage as the preferred unit of society.

This social experiment is so radical that it is unclear whether the liberationists will succeed in pushing their agenda through the courts. What is indefensible, and potentially tragic, is that some churches that should know better are providing moral encouragement for the project.

5. The Sacred Character of Marriage

Pastors are frequently confronted with couples who combine a desire for a "traditional church wedding" with the vaguest notions of what the Church means by marriage. I used to devote one premarital session with the couple to talk about this very discrepancy. I would ask them what specifically made them want a church wedding. Eventually, whether out of embarrassment or out of some spiritual intuition, one of them would mention God. "Oh," I would say, "then you want a church wedding because you want God to bless your marriage?" "Well... yes," the reply would come. "Tell me," I would go on, "why do you think God is the least bit interested in blessing your marriage?" Many interesting conversations, and some commitments to Christ, would follow from this question.

Why do we think the Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth, is interested in blessing any human relationship? And if he is, are we not interested in what limits he has laid down for that relationship? Put another way, does the Church get its ordinances from God, or is it free to make up some new ones or reconfigure them to its liking at a particular point in history? These are, finally, the crucial questions at issue in the current attempt to authorize same-sex marriage.

In previous sections, I have concluded that same-sex marriage fails to fulfill the particular purposes of nature and traditions of law, which brings us back to our definitional objection that same-sex marriage – or any simulacrum – is not really marriage at all. This becomes a particularly serious issue when we come to the claims that the Church makes for marriage. *For the Church to pronounce God's blessing on a relationship that is a counterfeit of the real thing is tantamount to blasphemy.*

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a sacrament is "a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers." Marriage, according to the Reformers, is not a

"dominical" sacrament, instituted by Christ, but in "signifying the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church," marriage certainly has a sacred, even a sacramental character. In the section that follows, I conclude that same-sex marriage cannot be sacred, either as a sign of the divine love or as a means to participate in that love.

Holy Matrimony as a Sign of the Gospel

The Church's sacred rites are inherently *typological*, i.e., taking an earthly form as a sign of a heavenly reality. As same-sex marriage cannot appropriately represent the earthly pattern of two-sexes-in-one-flesh union, it also fails to communicate essential elements of "difference in unity" between Christ and his Church. If adopted, same-sex marriage would inevitably misrepresent the nature of marriage as a covenant and violate the rhetoric of marriage as a union of husband and wife found in the marriage service.

Marriage as a Type of the Covenant

In calling marriage a "covenant," the Church, following Scripture, likens the marital bond to the greater covenant between God and his people. Monogamy operates by the same exclusive logic as monotheism. Israel cannot claim to be married to Yahweh and pursue other lovers without breaking the covenant and receiving a "divorce" from God (Hosea 2:2). God's people are capable of deluding themselves into thinking that they are married to Baal, but the prophets make clear that Israel's "intimate relationship" with Baal is nothing other than *prostitution*: "For long ago you broke your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, 'I will not serve.' Yea, upon every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down as a harlot" (Jeremiah 2:20).

The prophets finally offer hope that Israel's one true husband, who had divorced her, will betroth her again "in faithfulness" (Hosea 2:20). As the heart of marriage is forgiveness, so also mercy and forgiveness lie at the fount of God's covenant with his people. The promise of a new marriage covenant initiated by God lies behind Paul's imagery of Christ giving himself up in love for the Church "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

The relevance of the typology of the covenant is simply this: only God's chosen marriage can serve his salvific purposes, and those covenants that are not according to his design will serve as vehicles for a false spirituality. The burden of this section is to conclude that same-sex marriage is much more likely to convey a distorted rather than a true image of God's relationship to his people.

The rhetoric of the marriage service emphasizes the theme of *difference in unity*, which is central to marriage as a two-sexes-in-one-flesh union of man and woman, as repeatedly the Officiant refers to "this man and this woman" and "husband and wife."

Liturgical revisers could, of course, replace references to man and woman and husband and wife with “persons” and “spouses.” The result would be not only bland aesthetically but deficient theologically in communicating the divine analogy inherent in the marriage bond. One characteristic of recent “inclusive language” liturgies has been their incipient modalism. By trying to avoid naming God as Father and Christ as Son, they speak of God as Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, and the like. The same error will be at work in any “inclusive” marriage rite that tries to draw the analogy between same-sex partners and the “relationality” in the Godhead.

Marriage as a Means of Grace

Holy Matrimony is not in the same kind of rite as baptism and Eucharist. We are not saved through marriage. In fact, the Law intentionally separates marriage and sexuality from the religious and mythic meanings given in other cultures. The sacramental dimension of marriage therefore is not part of a general “metaphorical theology” but is specifically bound up with the Church’s confession of the one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The new iconoclasts, the prophets of the ethic of intimacy, are unabashed as they rend the veil between sexuality and spirituality. For liberationists the flow of grace does not move downward from the antitype (the Triune God) to the type (marriage) but rather upward from experience (sexuality) to theology (the “Divine”). Thus Carter Heyward can say: “I am interested not merely in a “theology of sexuality” – examining sexuality through theological lenses; but rather in probing the Sacred – exploring divine terrain – through sexual experience.”²⁹ In Professor Heyward’s platform, same-sex activity is only one plank of an entirely different construal of the Christian faith.

Discipleship and Marital Discipline

A genuine spirituality of marriage begins, not with projections of sexuality onto the divine, but with conforming our experience to our Lord’s covenant of grace. The “estates” of marriage and singleness are intended as a schoolyard of discipleship. Just as Jesus’ teaching on marriage and singleness in the Synoptic Gospels is rooted in the call to single-minded discipleship as the source of our identity, so in John, every love must be rooted in the love of the Father and the Son.

For this reason, marriage as a sacred rite is subordinate to baptism, and the Christian family is subordinate to God’s family, the Church. Many Christians, both laity and clergy, locate their primary loyalty in personal relationships with spouses and lovers, not with brothers and sisters in Christ. When it comes to personal decisions about having sex, getting married, divorcing, and remarrying, many Christians consult the oracle of intimacy first and then call on the Church to rubber-stamp their decision. Marriages can be as much an instrument of selfishness as any other institution. Even in “successful”

marriages, partners may manipulate each other, or jointly manipulate others in an air of complacent self-righteousness.

“What ought the church to teach and expect of people who profess and expect to be disciples of Christ?” Philip Turner asks.³⁰ The answer to this question, in the words of our Lord is, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). To present the cost of discipleship without the grace of Christian community would be equivalent to telling beggars to “go and be warmed.” The Church in its celebration of marriage and its offer of premarital and post-marital care of members has been a real help to many lonely people in and out of marriages, including many homosexuals. It must train its pastors to help people live faithfully in the present permissive society by means of solid teaching, competent counseling, and the ministry of prayer. It must also discipline itself so that it does not lead astray one of Christ’s little ones.

The need for marital discipline is particularly critical in the case of clergy. Gay rights advocates regularly remind Church leaders that they themselves have hardly upheld a sterling standard of lifelong monogamy in recent years. While there is a stinging truth in this accusation, surely the conclusion should be to strengthen the marital standards, not to loosen them. A Church that believes in the grace and power of the Gospel to change lives simply cannot succumb to such culture-bound fatalism.

Same-Sex Marriage and the Life of the World to Come

The Advent season is the Church’s regular reminder that it lives in the shadow of the prophets of the Old Testament who looked to a day of judgment and in expectation of Jesus Christ’s coming again in glory to judge the world and restore it to the fullness of its original design. Marriage exists in the tension between judgment and hope as much as any other institution.

Marriage in Heaven?

“Types and shadows have their endings.” For all of its importance as a pattern of the end-time wedding banquet of the Lamb, marriage itself seems to be an institution for this age only. Is this not the lesson to be learned from the encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees, when they ask him a test question about a woman married to seven successive husbands?

“In the resurrection, therefore, to which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her.” But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” (Matthew 22:28-30)

The Western Church has understood Jesus' teaching to mean that death brings every marriage to an end and that the love of the world to come will not include the particular love of husband and wife. The Eastern Church, on the other hand, teaches that the Christian husband and wife enter into an eternal sacramental bond. Protestants have been more reluctant to differentiate the state of the elect in heaven, although John Bunyan makes this comment about the Pilgrim's recognition of his family members entering the Heavenly City: "Since Relations are our second self, though that State [marriage] will be dissolved there, yet why may it not be rationally concluded that we shall be more glad to see them there, than to see they are wanting?"³¹

The heavenly Jerusalem is lighted by God and the Lamb, but surely their glory does not bleach out what Gerard Manley Hopkins called the "dappled" beauty of creation. And since gender is a central feature of this world order, should we not expect the heavenly world to be gendered in some recognizable way? In his science fiction novel *Perelandra*, C. S. Lewis imagined a world of gender beyond sex in which his hero Ransom overhears the divine love-songs of the principalities of Mars and Venus. Lewis goes on to explain:

Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact, merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others, and Masculine and Feminine meet us on planes of reality where male and female would be simply meaningless. Masculine is not attenuated male, nor feminine attenuated female. On the contrary, the male and female of organic creatures are rather faint and blurred reflections of masculine and feminine. Their reproductive functions, their differences in strength and size, partly exhibit, but partly also confuse and misrepresent, the real polarity.³²

If Lewis' intuition has any validity, it might help explain how married partners might experience a form of erotic unity-in-difference while being "like angels." At the same time, perhaps, same-sex friendships, purged of erotic confusion, may come to their fulfillment as well.

What all historic traditions hold in common is a sense of the permanence of marriage for this age and of some sort of continuity of relational identity in the world to come. Traditional marriage is a kind of typological anchor, as it were, holding fast the Christian imagination of things to come. We see through a glass darkly, but we believe that what will be in the future will be some glorified version of the creation, the earthly city.

Conclusion

The Church does not hold marriage and family to be the source of salvation, but it does see in the family an image

of the kingdom of God. When it prays "Our Father," it knows that there is an unbreakable bond between "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named," and the institution he has ordained on earth. To be ashamed of the institution of marriage as it is given to us is to be ashamed of our heavenly Father. To endorse same-sex marriage is at heart a rebellion against his most gracious rule.

For two thousand years Christians have been declaring: "those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder." The Church has no authority to put asunder the sacrament of marriage as instituted by the Lord – either by revising the marriage rite to include same-sex pairs or by devising some quasi-marital sacred rite alongside it.

6. The Unchangeable Glory of Marriage

*Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony.... The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.*³³

All over the world, men and women have entered and will enter into Holy Matrimony with words like these ringing in their ears. But will these words still be spoken in all the churches? I hope so, but I am not sure. Those who would revise the doctrine of marriage are reminiscent of Humpty Dumpty when he said "There's glory for you."

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

I side with Alice. Clever proposals and arguments that seek to change the "glory," – that is, the essential character (1 Corinthians 15:41-42) – of Christian marriage may or may not pass church conventions. What they cannot do, by a mere act of human will, is make marriage into something else, and the folly of any attempt will eventually be revealed.

I believe that God is refining his Church and the institution of marriage by means of this present identity crisis. This refining must involve our repentance, which includes thinking more deeply about the true meaning of marriage. As a result of this repentance, God may teach us how to be better disciples and to value elements of Holy Matrimony that we have taken for granted or neglected. By rediscovering the riches of our heritage, we may even be able to speak, humbly and wisely, to our fellow citizens who are suffering from the breakdown of this divine institution.

Whatever the mysteries of God's providence, one thing is certain: for this present age marriage is based on his plan for two sexes to become one flesh. The glory of *two sexes, one flesh* will not pass away until that day when the Father summons his blessed Church to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

¹ Cf., Edward Stein, *The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
² For a standard definition, see "Sex and Sexuality" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia* (15th ed., 1986) 27.245.
³ *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
⁴ Tim Stafford, *The Sexual Christian* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1989) 15-19.
⁵ See Christopher R. Seitz, "Repugnance and the Three-Legged Stool: Modern Use of Scripture and the Baltimore Declaration," in *Reclaiming Faith: Essays on Orthodoxy in the Episcopal Church and the Baltimore Declaration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 87.
⁶ Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 243.
⁷ "Finding a Way to Talk: Dealing with Difficult Topics in the Episcopal Church," in *Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the Household of God*, ed. Charles Hefling (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1996) 11-12.
⁸ Cf. Hays, *Moral Vision*, 399: "Only because the new experience of Gentile converts proved *hermeneutically illuminating* of Scripture was the church, over time, able to accept the decision to embrace Gentiles within the fellowship of God's people."
⁹ *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). We note *causa honoris* one essay in this volume by Ulrich Mauser that upholds the plain

sense of Scripture. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., meeting in July 1996, did not follow the direction suggested by the rest of these essays.
¹⁰ Oliver O'Donovan, "Transsexualism and Christian Marriage," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983) 146.
¹¹ Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic* (New York: Free Press, 1986) 339.
¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 42.
¹³ Germain Grisez, "The Christian Family as Fulfillment of Sacramental Marriage," in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 9 (1996) 30. A view similar to Grisez's was articulated by Otto Piper, *The Biblical View of Sex and Marriage* (New York: Scriber's, 1960) 137-138.
¹⁴ See Wendy Shalit, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (New York: Free Press, 1999).
¹⁵ See Edward Stein, ed., *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
¹⁶ Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 307-309.
¹⁷ David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
¹⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 1988).
¹⁹ Dennis Prager, "Judaism's Sexual Revolution," *Crisis* (Sept. 1993) 29. The original version of Prager's essay appeared in *Ultimate Issues* 6/2 (Apr./Jun. 1990) 1-24.
²⁰ Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 356.
²¹ *Second Treatise on Government*, sec. 78.
²² *Emile or On Education*, ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979) 357-358.
²³ *Democracy in America* 3.12.
²⁴ *The War over the Family: Capturing the Middle Ground* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1983) 172.
²⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1961) 51.
²⁶ *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), 152.
²⁷ Paula L. Eitelbrick, "Marriage Is Not a Path to Liberation," in *Homosexuality: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1993) 180-181.
²⁸ John Spong, *Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988) 208-218; Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1996) 202.
²⁹ *Touching Our Strength*, 3.
³⁰ "Limited Engagements," in Philip Turner, ed., *Men and Women: Sexual Ethics in Turbulent Times* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1989) 55.
³¹ *The Pilgrim's Progress* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 292.
³² C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Macmillan, 1943) 200.
³³ Book of Common Prayer (Episcopal Church U.S.A., 1979) 423.

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