

# Theology Matters

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## Two Views of Marriage

by Alan F. H. Wisdom

The church's historic understanding of marriage may be the foremost doctrine under fire at the 220<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2012) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Redefining marriage is the next logical step in the normalization of sexual relationships outside the marriage of man and woman. With the 2011 deletion of the requirement that ordained PC(USA) officers exercise either "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness," the way is now open to broaden the denomination's definition of "the covenant of marriage."

At least nine overtures, with many concurrences, propose to change that definition to embrace same-sex couples. Some overtures would accomplish this revision by amending the *Book of Order* to replace every reference to "a man and a woman" marrying with new language speaking of "two people" marrying. To take effect, these amendments would have to be ratified by a majority of the presbyteries.

Other overtures would achieve a similar result through an "authoritative interpretation" of the PC(USA) constitution adopted by majority vote of a single General Assembly. This interpretation would grant "pastoral discretion" to Presbyterian teaching elders to officiate at any wedding in which the couple held a civil marriage license. The effect would be to convey the church's blessing upon same-sex marriages in any state that recognized such marriages under civil law. As more

states approve same-sex marriage, it would become the norm in the PC(USA) too.

None of these revisionist overtures addresses the several passages in the *Book of Confessions* teaching that marriage is "a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last as long as they both shall live" (Westminster Confession, 6.133). But one overture (12-048) notes and reaffirms these confessional teachings, as well as the biblical texts that stand behind them. This traditionalist overture offers an "authoritative interpretation" stating that "this definition of marriage in the Directory for Worship is binding upon teaching elders and commissioned ruling elders authorized to perform Christian marriages." It insists, "The church's definition of marriage may be changed only through amendment of both W-4.9001 [in the *Book of Order*] and the confessional passages upon which it is based."

Thus it appears that two very different views of marriage will clash at the June 30-July 7 assembly in Pittsburgh. These views were framed by the 2010 General Assembly. Unable to decide between two

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reports on marriage—one from a Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage, the other from a minority of that committee—the assembly sent out both reports for Presbyterians to study.

A comparison of the two reports may help church members weigh the two views of marriage in light of the proposals coming to the 2012 assembly. The following set of study questions aims to elucidate that comparison. The two reports are available online at [www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/civil-union-christian-marriage2010.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/civil-union-christian-marriage2010.pdf). Overtures to the 2012 General Assembly are available at [www.pc-biz.org](http://www.pc-biz.org).

## 1. View of Scripture.

The **committee report** says: “In matters of faith and practice, the church turns to Scripture to hear the testimony of the Holy Spirit, acknowledging that it comes to us in human words, conditioned by the times in which they were written, times different from our own. Guided by literary and historical understanding, we study Scripture, so that we might follow the Word of God incarnate in our changing world.” (p. 3)

The committee presents biblical passages mainly as reflecting the opinions of the human authors or the prevailing practices of their cultures. For example, it asserts, “The Old Testament assumes an ancient Semitic understanding of marriage as the basis for the family, the fundamental unit of Hebrew society” (p. 3). The committee does not raise the possibility that God might have intended marriage to be the basis for the family. In narrating the history of marriage, the committee emphasizes the variability of the institution.

“There is no consistent biblical model for marriage,” according to the revisionist Overture 12-009. “Nowhere does the Bible expressly define marriage as between one man and one woman. Neither does the Bible serve us well as a how-to manual on modern marriage.” Overture 12-040, likewise revisionist, argues: “The biblical tradition does not present one single model of marriage. Biblical testimony and clear commandments concerning marriage are outdated...(unless we want to resurrect polygamy in tribal society or the even more obscure institution of levirate marriage [in which a man marries his brother’s widow]).”

The **minority report** says, “In matters of faith and practice, the church turns to Scripture to hear the testimony of the Holy Spirit, so that we might follow the Word of God incarnate in our changing world. A review of Scripture, the confessions, and the history of marriage in the church presents a consistent view of the

most foundational aspect of the nature of marriage: that it unites a man and a woman.” (p. 26)

The minority explains, “Genesis 2:18-24 tells how God gives humanity the gift of marriage,” including “[c]omplementary completeness for man and woman.” It adds, “In addressing a question on divorce, Jesus defines marriage (Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-9). In this definition, Jesus wipes away generations of misused tradition (divorce, polygamy) and brings humankind back to God’s design in Gen. 2:24” (p. 27).

**Questions:** Read Genesis 2:18-25 and Matthew 19:3-6, as well as other passages such as 1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5:21-27. Do you agree that there is no biblical definition of marriage? Or does Jesus indeed define marriage for his followers? Are the biblical commandments relating to marriage outdated and of no use to modern people? What about polygamy? Was it ever commanded in the Old Testament? Do New Testament prohibitions of polygamy (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:2) settle the question, or does the Bible advise us to “resurrect polygamy”?

## 2. God’s Design in Creation?

The **committee report** does not contain a clear summary statement of God’s will for human sexuality. The committee does not quote or discuss Jesus’ statement that “the one who them at 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’” (Matt. 19:4-5). Nor does it quote or discuss the passages in Genesis 1 and 2 to which Jesus was referring. There is no notion of humans having been created and designed to follow a particular pattern of sexual relationship.

The **minority report** states: “In Genesis, God says it is not good for man to be alone. A woman is made who completes Adam and the two of them become one flesh.... God’s gracious intent for our sexuality is that we would find the one who completes us. Our bodies are carefully designed by the Creator to belong to the one created for us before the foundation of the world was laid. Any sexual activity outside of marriage violates this beautiful intention of God.... We should see celibacy as a gift as Paul did and support and encourage single people.”

**Questions:** Is God the author of marriage? Did he institute it in creation? Did he have a purpose for marriage? If so, what is that purpose or purposes? Can we say that behaviors violating God’s purposes are wrong?

### 3. Does Marriage Have Anything to Do With Sex?

The **committee report** does not mention any connection between marriage and sexual relations. The revisionist Overture 12-020 claims: “Marriage is beyond gender. It refers to the commitment of two people to live beside each other with a love expressed as tenderness and justice.” In weddings, it says, we “recognize the love of two hearts declaring themselves to be a home to each other, before God, with gratitude.” It is not clear whether these “two hearts” are having sexual relations, or whether it makes any difference if they are.

The **minority report** notes how Jesus in Matthew 19/Mark 10 connects God’s creation of humans as male and female (Genesis 1) to his institution of marriage in Genesis 2. It stresses how the two complementary sexes “become one flesh” physically and in every other way. Marriage is “traditionally consummated by male-female intercourse,” the minority observes, and it “form[s] a family, often with the expectation of children resulting from their sexual union” (pp. 31-32).

The minority remarks that this pattern of marriage holds true not only within the Christian community, but also for humankind throughout history. It cites a definition of marriage offered by social science scholar David Blankenhorn: “In all or nearly all human societies, marriage is socially approved sexual intercourse between a woman and a man, conceived both as a personal relationship and as an institution, primarily such that any children resulting from the union are—and are understood by society to be—emotionally, morally, practically, and legally affiliated with both parents” (p. 35).

The minority notes that same-sex partners do not fit within this biblical and traditional understanding of marriage. A “sexual relationship [is] presumed” in such cases, it says, but the “acts [are] not specified” in the same way. Any children in a same-sex household have at least one “biological parent outside the household” and must be separated from that parent (pp. 31-32).

**Questions:** Is marriage just a relationship between any persons who declare their love for one another? If so, why can’t friends in a “platonic” relationship be married? Why can’t brothers and sisters marry? If feelings of emotional attachment are the only prerequisite for marriage, why limit the number of persons in a marriage to two? Or, on the other hand, is it possible that marriage has something to do with bringing together the two created sexes? Does the union of male and female bodies as “one flesh” consummate a marriage in a way that no other act could? Is the fact

that every child has precisely one biological father and one biological mother connected in any way to the fact that marriage has traditionally united precisely one man and one woman?

### 4. Is Marriage the Norm for Sexual Expression?

The **committee report** places no clear boundaries on sexual expression. In answer to the question “What is the place of covenanted same-gender partnerships in the Christian community?” the committee states, “The members of the PC(USA) cannot agree” (p. 13). In the absence of agreement, the committee declines to set any boundary between relationships to be encouraged or discouraged. “[I]t is inappropriate for us to seek to define ‘the place’ for any of our sisters and brothers in Christ’s church,” the committee says (p. 15).

The **minority report** states forthrightly: “It is the intent of this report to represent the church’s biblical, historic, and confessional position that, among all varieties of sexual relationships, only marriage between a man and a woman is ordained by God and blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ” (p. 20). It counsels: “Therefore, friendships, whether of same or opposite gender, which do not violate God’s boundaries of sexual expression as defined in Scripture, the confessions and the *Book of Order* can be honored and encouraged. However, those relationships, whether same or opposite gendered, that although committed and caring, which are outside of God’s design of sexual expression, cannot be encouraged or blessed” (p. 25).

**Questions:** Can we find any indication in Scripture that any sexual relationship outside the marriage of man and woman is ordained by God or blessed by Christ? If God does not ordain or bless a relationship, is the church at liberty to celebrate and encourage that relationship? What is the church’s standard for appropriate sexual expression? If it is not marriage, what else could be the standard? Does the fact that church members disagree on a standard imply that the biblical standard no longer exists or applies? Does the act of setting a standard mean that those who fall short of the standard in one area have no place in the church? Or do we recognize that all fall short, in one way or another, and all are invited to take a place among the company of the redeemed?

### 5. What the Confessions Say About Marriage

The **committee report** does not survey or summarize the confessional teachings on marriage. It mentions the confessions mainly as expressions of diverse past

attitudes rather than guides for present practice. The key section on “the place of covenanted same-gender partnerships” does not refer to any confessional passages on marriage. Nor does any of the revisionist overtures mention any of those passages.

The **minority report** states, “In our [PC(USA)] confessions, marriage is consistently defined as a lifelong covenant between God, a man and a woman, and the community of faith” (p. 20). It cites teachings on marriage in five confessions: the Heidelberg Catechism (4.108), the Second Helvetic Confession (5.246), the Westminster Confession (6.131-139), the Larger Catechism (7.248-249), and the Confession of 1967 (9.47).

The minority highlights Westminster’s beautiful definition of marriage: “Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other’s infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life (6.131)” (p. 27).

The minority quotes at length the Confession of 1967’s discussion of how “[t]he relationship between man and woman [in marriage] exemplifies in a basic way God’s ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind.” The confession also warns against the “[a]narchy in sexual relationships” that results when people are alienated from God and God’s ways (p. 26).

**Questions:** Read the confessional passages cited above. Are they consistent with the Scriptures that we have studied? Do the confessions sketch a fairly consistent picture of Christian marriage? Do they portray marriage as just an emotional bond between “two hearts,” or is it much more than that? Under this confessional teaching, is marriage built upon God’s design in creation? Is the union of the two sexes an essential feature of that design? Is there any suggestion in the confessions that the church might bless a sexual relationship other than the marriage of man and woman? Is “anarchy” indeed the result when the church starts to affirm and encourage non-marital sexual relations?

## 6. The Book of Order on Marriage

The *Book of Order*, the second part of the PC(USA) constitution, states: “Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human

family. Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians, marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage, a lifelong commitment is made by a woman and a man to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.” (W-4.9001)

The **committee report** quotes this passage once, deep in the body of the text (p. 8), but not in its introduction, its conclusions, or the crucial section on “What Is the Place of Covenanted Same-Gender Partnerships in the Christian Community?” It does not appear that the *Book of Order*—or the confessions, or the Scriptures—determines the committee’s answer to that question. It looks instead to public opinion: “The members of the PC(USA) cannot agree” on how to handle same-sex partnerships (p. 13), and therefore the committee has no answer either.

Revisionist overtures like 12-009, 020, and 040 propose to desex W-4.9001, replacing its repeated references to “a man and a woman,” “a woman and a man,” with generic references to “two people.”

The **minority report** cites this *Book of Order* passage as “Our Starting Place” in its introduction (p. 21). It also refers repeatedly to W-4.9001 in its conclusions, showing how it fits together with the confessions in laying down a consistent constitutional doctrine of marriage. The minority stresses common points such as: that God is the author of marriage, that marriage is intended to be lifelong, that God gave marriage as a blessing to all humankind, that the parties to a marriage are one man and one woman, and that marriage is both a civil contract and a covenant before God.

**Questions:** Is the *Book of Order* passage consistent with the confessional statements on marriage? Does it confirm or challenge the belief that God is the author of marriage? Does the repetition of “a man and a woman,” “a woman and a man” suggest that the union of the two sexes is an essential or an accidental feature of marriage? Would changing these phrases to “two people” be a major or a minor shift in how the church understands marriage? According to this passage, is marriage an exclusively Christian institution? Is it an entirely secular matter in which the church has no interest? If the church does have a role in marriage, how would you describe that role?

## 7. Definition or Description?

The **revisionist Overture 12-028** claims, “There is nothing in the text of W-4.9000 that makes the ‘man

and woman' description mandatory and the other details not mandatory." Overture 12-010 says, "In the absence of mandatory language in the *Book of Order* that would prohibit a service of Christian marriage for any two people who are legally permitted to marry, the assembly should give such assurance [that such marriages may be celebrated in the church] in the form of the proposed authoritative interpretation."

The **traditionalist Overture 12-048** argues to the contrary: "This definition is far more than a neutral description of social reality—what marriage may have been in a particular society at a particular point in history. It is a normative description of what marriage is intended to be, according to God's design. This passage in the Directory for Worship reflects distinctive Reformed teaching that stood and stands in conscious contrast to other extant understandings of marriage. Contrary to Roman Catholics, the Reformers insisted that marriage should be a civil contract under the jurisdiction of civil courts, rather than a sacrament under the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts. Contrary to some radical Anabaptists, the Reformers maintained that marriage could only be between one husband and one wife—not multiple wives. In opposition to those who might view marriage as a narrowly Christian phenomenon, the Reformers saw marriage as a gift of God's common grace revealed in every society. In opposition to those who might reduce marriage to a merely human contract, they esteemed it also as a covenant before God. In opposition to those who might regard marriage as simply a private bond between two individuals, the Reformers saw it as a social institution lived out in the community that witnessed the vows. Likewise, the repetition of the phrase 'a man and a woman,' 'a woman and a man' in W-4.9001 reflects the understanding that the 'one flesh' union of the two created sexes is an essential feature of marriage as God designed it."

**Questions:** Is the language of W-4.9001 merely descriptive, acknowledging that marriage in the past has been a civil contract between a man and a woman? Or is it normative, setting forth God's will for marriage? If the latter, isn't God's will mandatory for the church and its ministers?

## 8. Authoritative Interpretations on Marriage

In its historical section, the **committee report** notes a series of authoritative interpretations of the PC(USA) constitution, dating back to 1991, by the General Assembly and its Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC). The committee indicates that the GAPJC "has declared that any same-sex ceremony 'considered to be the equivalent of a marriage ceremony...would

not be sanctioned under the *Book of Order*.' As such, it has instructed ministers of the Word and Sacrament not to 'state, imply, or represent that a same-sex ceremony is a marriage,' and has instructed sessions against the use of church facilities in any same-sex ceremony deemed to be the equivalent of a marriage. In *Benton, et al. v. Presbytery of Hudson River* (2000) the GAPJC did allow for individual ministers and sessions to conduct a same-sex ceremony that 'celebrates a loving, caring and committed relationship' that does not 'confer a new status' but 'blesses an existing relationship.' These services are not to be confused with Christian marriage or civil marriage, 'do not constitute a marriage ceremony,' and 'should not be construed as an endorsement of homosexual conjugal practice proscribed by the General Assembly.'" (p. 7)

The **minority report** deals with the authoritative interpretations not only in its historical section but also in its conclusions. It includes a phrase from a 2008 GAPJC decision that was omitted from the committee report: that "under W-4.9001 a same-sex ceremony is not and cannot be a marriage" (p. 24).

**Questions:** Are these authoritative interpretations consistent with the passages in the Scriptures, the confessions, and the *Book of Order* that we have studied? Why does the GAPJC maintain that "a same-sex ceremony is not and cannot be a marriage"? If a same-sex ceremony is not a marriage, does not change the status of the partners, and does not constitute an endorsement of homosexual conjugal practice, what is being celebrated in such a ceremony?

## 9. Is Conscience Bound by Biblical and Confessional Teachings?

The **committee report** offers a covenant under which those subscribing pledge to "[h]onor who we are as Presbyterians by respecting the fallible discernment of the body, bearing in mind that individual conscience, held captive to the word of God, cannot be thus bound" (p. 14).

The **minority report** includes a similar covenant (p. 25), but without the clause about how conscience "cannot be thus bound." Elsewhere, the minority notes: "So our consciences are not free in every respect, but rather we are called to bring them into captivity to God's Word. It is only when confronted with demands that are 'contrary to his Word, or beside it,' that we may claim freedom of conscience." (p. 23) And it quotes the *Book of Order*: "[I]n becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as

interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body.” (p. 24, from G-6.0108)

**Questions:** Do church officers empowered to solemnize marriages have complete freedom of conscience? Or are their consciences bound in some ways?

## 10. Two Equal Positions?

The **committee report** presents two positions as equally valid within the church: “Still, some believe acceptance of same-gender partnerships to be tantamount to approving homosexual practice, which they find at odds with Scripture and our confessions. Others have no difficulty accepting same-gender partnerships, pointing to biblical principles of love and justice.” (p. 13)

The **minority report** acknowledges two (or more) positions in the church, but insists: “The fact that equal sisters and brothers in Christ have differing convictions does not imply that all those convictions have equal standing in the church. The historic principles maintain that ‘no opinion can be more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood on a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man’s opinions are....’” (p. 23)

**Questions:** Do these two positions hold equal standing in the church? Or is one more consistent with the Scriptures as the church understands them in its confessions? Is it possible that both positions could be equally true? Or must we choose one or the other?

## 11. Local Option on Marriage?

The **committee report** encourages local presbyteries and session to “provide resources” regarding use of church facilities and participation of ministers in marriages and same-sex union ceremonies. It says such resources should be “consonant with the [PC(USA)] constitution,” but does not specify what the constitution might require (p. 1).

The **minority report** does not suggest that each presbytery and session write its own policy on marriage. The assumption is that the PC(USA) already has adequate standards in its constitution. “As we work through our disagreements, we recognize that church teaching and church policy are still set by the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).... Since decisions relating to marriage are made by ministers and sessions, it is well to review the obligations of those officers. All church officers vow to ‘be instructed and led by those confessions as [they]

lead the people of God.’ They also pledge to ‘be governed by our church’s polity’ and ‘abide by its discipline’ (*Book of Order*, W-4.4003).” (p. 24)

**Questions:** Do local presbyteries and sessions have the option to adopt marriage policies at variance with the PC(USA) constitution? If the constitution says a relationship is not a marriage, is a teaching elder at liberty to call it a marriage?

## 12. Mutual Forbearance or Mutual Accountability?

In answer to the question “What is the place of covenanted same-gender partnerships in the Christian community?” the **committee report** responds, “The members of the PC(USA) cannot agree” (p. 13).

The committee report contends: “We must seek a way to live together as the body of Christ, not through peaceable uniformity, but by exercising mutual tolerance and forbearance in those areas where people of good faith differ” (p. 14). The committee implies that church teaching on marriage and the proper boundaries of sexual expression is one such area. It rejects “coercive means of achieving uniformity” as “ultimately unhelpful” (pp. 14-15).

The **minority report** quotes the same *Book of Order* passage on “mutual forbearance” regarding “matters and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ” (G-1.0305). But the minority also quotes the adjoining passage: “On the other hand, where Scripture does determine a question, ‘it is incumbent upon these officers, and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure and cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing, in all cases, the rules contained in the Word of God’ (G-1.0304).” The minority remarks, “The issue before us is whether this question of covenanted same-gender partnerships is determined by the Word of God or not.” It adds, “Members of the special committee may not agree on civil unions and Christian marriage; however, the constitution has authoritative provisions that bear on these questions. Until such time as the church’s understanding of marriage is changed in the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*, those provisions remain in force.” (pp. 23-24)

**Questions:** Is the question of covenanted same-sex partnerships a “matter ... with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ”? Is it determined by Scripture? How far should church members and officers go in extending mutual forbearance? At what point should they expect mutual

accountability to authoritative provisions in the PC(USA) constitution?

### 13. Marriage as Pastoral Care?

The **revisionist Overture 12-010** declares, “Teaching elders and sessions need the General Assembly’s assurance of their pastoral discretion to provide the care that their members require.” The overture offers an authoritative interpretation permitting same-sex marriages to “prevent deep grief to church members who might otherwise be denied the pastoral care of the church.”

**Questions:** Is a wedding service principally an act of pastoral care, comparable to private counseling or visiting a sick person in the hospital? Or is it an act of public worship in which the congregation praises God for the gift of marriage, the people hear God’s Word regarding marriage, and a couple commits themselves to live out that Word in their lives? (See W-3.3503.) Would it be true pastoral care to tell a couple that they are married if, according to Scripture, their relationship is not a marriage? Does a teaching elder deny pastoral care when she says the relationship is not a marriage, while promising every kind of prayer and counseling with the individuals involved?

### 14. Is It Discrimination to Say Some Relationships Aren’t Marriage?

The **revisionist Overture 12-056** reports, “Same gender couples are coming to our churches with state-issued marriage licenses in hand, asking us to give them an equal level of respect and pastoral care as we give to the opposite gender couples in our congregations.” The overture suggests that refusing to perform a same-sex marriage constitutes a denial of the *Book of Order* affirmation that “[m]arriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family.”

Overture 12-016 complains, “Where same-gender marriage is recognized under the law, it is neither fair nor pastoral to exclude members of a congregation by declining to perform their marriage on the grounds of gender alone.”

Overture 12-009 objects, “One part of our current Presbyterian polity specifically excludes a group of people when it comes to worship: those people in loving, committed, Christian relationships who are also of the same gender and wish to marry.” The overture holds this limitation to be contrary to the words of Paul

in Galatians 3:28: “... there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

**Questions:** Is the affirmation that “[m]arriage is a gift God has given to all humankind” a guarantee that everyone will be called to marriage and able to find a suitable spouse? Or is it an affirmation that the entire society benefits when those called to marriage live out their vows? Does “an equal level of respect” for individuals imply that all sexual relationships into which they might enter must be treated as morally equivalent? Are individuals excluded from Christian worship when the church advises them that the relationship in which they are involved does not fit the criteria of Christian marriage? Is it unfair to say that all individuals have a limited pool of potential spouses: that the spouse must be of age and able to consent, a member of the opposite sex, not a close blood relative, and not already married? Do Paul’s words that “there is no longer male or female” mean that it no longer matters that God created humans male and female, or that the union of the two sexes no longer has any special value? Or does it mean that in Christ men and women, different though they are, enjoy equal dignity and access to God?

### 15. Must the Church Conform Its Doctrine to State Law and Social Trends?

The **revisionist Overture 12-009** points to “an error in the Directory for Worship”—viz., “In six states ... and the District of Columbia it is not factually true that ‘marriage is a civil contract between a man and a woman.’” Overture 12-040 aims to correct the discrepancy: “Civil authorities in several states make it legal for same gender couples to marry. The *Book of Order* should respect and reflect this change in society and make appropriate changes in its language.”

Overture 12-056 says, “It is clear in the second sentence of W-4.9001 [‘Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man’] that the PC(USA) recognizes the importance of the civil definition of marriage.” The overture maintains, on the basis of Romans 13:1-2, that “the scriptural direction seems to be towards being subject to the laws of the state as much as we are able.” Therefore, “in those jurisdictions that recognize same-sex marriage the *Book of Order* must be understood to mean two persons who can be legally married.”

The **traditionalist Overture 12-048** notes: “A 2011 GAPJC decision concerned a PC(USA) minister officiating at a ceremony between two women in Massachusetts, where their union was recognized as a marriage under civil law. The GAPJC ruled unanimously: ‘The question before this Commission,

then, is whether the Massachusetts law defining this relationship as a legal marriage changes the impact of the definitions in W-4.9001. This Commission holds that it does not. While the PC(USA) is free to amend its definition of marriage, a change in state law does not amend the *Book of Order*. It is the responsibility of the church, following the processes provided in the Constitution for amendment, to define what the PC(USA) recognizes as a “Christian marriage.” Consequently, *Spahr’s* holding, “By the definition in W-4.9001, a same sex ceremony can never be a marriage,” remains in effect.”

**Questions:** Is it an “error” that the *Book of Order* defines marriage as “a civil contract between a woman and a man”? Or is it a statement of God’s intention for marriage as we understand it in Scripture? Does “recognizing the importance of the civil definition of marriage” mean that Presbyterians delegate to the state the power to define marriage for the church? Does “being subject to the laws of the state” imply that the church must bring its doctrines into conformity with state laws? Or is the GAPJC right that “a change in the state law does not amend the *Book of Order*”?

## 16. What Would It Take to Change the Church’s Definition of Marriage?

Several **revisionist overtures** propose to change the church’s definition of marriage by amending W-4.9001

and related passages in the *Book of Order*. Other overtures would pursue the same objective by an authoritative interpretation of W-4.9001. None of them seeks to alter the confessional texts upon which W-4.9001 is based.

The **traditionalist Overture 12-048** insists: “Since the PC(USA)’s definition of marriage is expressed in both parts of its constitution, the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*, any attempt to change that definition would necessarily involve amendments to both parts. Changing one part without making corresponding changes in the other part would generate contradictions, confusion, and disorder that would ill serve the church. A change of any magnitude in the church’s doctrine of marriage should occur only through the rigorous process of confessional amendment, requiring careful deliberation at multiple General Assemblies and in every presbytery.”

**Questions:** Would an authoritative interpretation be sufficient to change the PC(USA) definition of marriage? Would amending the *Book of Order* alone be sufficient? Would an authoritative interpretation be the wise, proper, and just way to effect such a major change?

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# Marriage on Trial

By Glenn T. Stanton and Bill Maier

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## Answering the Same-Sex Marriage Proponents

**Question 2. Does it really matter how we define marriage?**

**Answer.** It matters in many deep ways. No society has ever allowed a “suit yourself” approach to family,

where people choose to live in whatever relationships seem to work for them. All societies need people to live within specific parameters regarding marriage. This is why natural marriage is humanly universal. God has

weaved marriage into human nature so that it serves two primary purposes throughout all societies:

- Marriage always brings male and female adults together into committed sexual and domestic relationships in order to regulate sexuality and provide for the needs of daily life. Wives help men channel their sexual energy into socially productive and nonpredatory ways. Husbands help protect women from the exploitation of other males.
- Marriage ensures that children have the benefits of both their mother and their father, each in their distinctive and unique ways.

Together, these two aspects of marriage have been the means by which we build strong human communities, generation after generation. As anthropologists tell us, these primary needs shape the family and social norms for all known societies.<sup>1</sup>

Same-sex relationships cannot provide these benefits. These unions provide no essential social good, instead they primarily address the personal or emotional needs and desires of consenting adults. In addition a growing number of these couples want access to the legal and financial benefits granted to those whom society recognizes as married.

One of our nation's most eminent political scientists and social thinkers, James Q. Wilson, brings clarity to what all societies need marriage to do:

[T]he purpose of marriage...has always been to make the family secure, not to redefine what constitutes a family. The family is a more fundamental social reality than a marriage, and so pretending that anything we call a marriage can create a family is misleading.... By family, I mean a lasting, socially enforced obligation between a man and a woman that authorizes sexual congress and the supervision of children.... There is no society where women alone care for each other and their children; there is none where fathers are not obligated to support their children and the mothers to whom they were born. Not only do men need women, women need men.<sup>2</sup> (pp. 22-23)

**Question 3. Shouldn't two people who love each other be allowed to commit themselves to one another?**

**Answer.** Yes, but we don't always call it marriage. Parents commit themselves to their children, but they aren't married. Friends love and commit themselves to each other, but they aren't married. Coworkers, athletes

and soldiers can even love each other and enjoy great commitment, but we don't call it marriage.

Marriage is about a whole lot more than love and commitment. It is not less than these things, to be sure, but it is certainly much more.

Marriage is built on a paradox of humanity—that we exist as male and female. The strong benefit of marriage is that males and females are designed with profound differences, and these differences are coordinated in marriage so that each contributes what the other lacks.<sup>3</sup> Together they create something larger than themselves. The polarity of the two genders is inextricably locked into the meaning and practice of marriage.

....The benefit of male and female in marriage is not confined to reproduction. The complement and exchange between the sexes provides huge and irreplaceable benefits for both males and females because these differences are rooted in every part of our being. Male and female are not interchangeable human parts. Love and commitment are necessary, but they are not sufficient to form a marriage. Marriage requires persons of different sexes to love and commit themselves to each other.

Besides, couldn't the "people should be able to marry who they love" argument be made for nearly any kind of union? If this is the new criteria for allowing people to marry, how can we say no to a woman who loves a polygamist and wants to become his third wife? How do we say no to Jonathan Yabrough and Cody Rogahn, the first couple to get a same-sex marriage license in Provincetown, Massachusetts, on May 17, 2004? Yabrough, a bisexual, said to the press just before his wedding, "I think it's possible to love more than one person and have more than one partner....In our case, we have an open marriage."<sup>4</sup> So what if this couple wanted to expand their own marriage to include some of these other people they plan to love? How would we—how could we—say no? On what basis could we rule out incest, condoning sexual relations and marriage between, say, a loving mother and her adoring son who are both consenting adults? (pp. 24-25)

**Question 4. Why restrict marriage to two persons of different gender, as long as it's restricted to two adults who love each other and are not closely related biologically?**

**Answer.** While you're rejecting one standard of marriage—male and female—you're holding on to another: that it's only about two people. If love and commitment were the only criteria for marriage, then not only would concern for gender be eliminated but so

would the concern over the number of people in a marriage and their biological relationship. We agree that these kinds of limits to marriage are legitimate and that in maintaining them no one's rights are being violated. Marriage naturally brings with it its own demands. These are what make it marriage. Without them, marriage becomes something else.

Actually there is more of a human-experience case for the gender limit than the number limit. Marriage has always been between men and women in *all* cultures, but it has not always been between two people. Many societies throughout history and the world have practiced polygamy. However, most developed nations enforce a system of male-female monogamy.

But this brings us back to the original question: If marriage is simply about people who love each other and gender doesn't matter for marriage and the family, why does the number of spouses? What criteria will we have for limiting couples like Mister Yarbrough and Rogahan who wish to expand the size of their open marriage to include any of the other people they could fall in love with? What about the gay or lesbian couples who want to "marry" their opposite sex sperm donors in order to make a "complete" family? The question is much more than a rhetorical countermove. In fact, Stanley Kurtz, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, argues that the "slippery slope" from gay to group marriage is very real and well-greased. He warns:

The bottom of the slope is visible from where we stand. Advocacy of legalized polygamy is growing. A network of grass-roots organizations seeking legal recognition for group marriage already exists..... Actually, there are now many such organizations. And their strategy—even their existence—owes much to the movement for gay marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Kurtz warns that revolutionaries who call themselves "polyamorists" are also capitalizing on the gains won by the same-sex marriage advocates and are ready to make the "love and commitment/justice and equality" case for their idea of marriage. (pp. 25-26)

### **Question 5. What is polyamory?**

**Answer.** *Polyamory* refers to group marriage. This is different from *polygamy*, where a man takes many wives. Polyamory has been around for a while. Its roots are found in the utopian Oneida Community of New York, founded in the mid 1800s. This large but short-lived community of men and women lived as a married group, openly sharing work, homes, children and their beds.<sup>6</sup> Polyamory was continued in some of the hippie communes of the 1960s and early 1970s. Any skeptics of the current vibrancy of the polyamory

movement should Google the word *polyamory* and see how much serious support there is for this phenomenon. Kurtz explains that "polyamorists are enthusiastic proponents of same-sex marriage."<sup>7</sup> If the same-sex advocates are successful in abolishing the idea that marriage is only between one man and one woman, then the hard part of making the group marriage case is done. As same-sex advocates make a way for the never-before tolerated definition of homosexual marriage, then it will be easy to usher in multiple-spouse marriages because all that is required in this definition of marriage is the verbal declaration of love and some kind of commitment to someone, anyone. We wager the speed by which this will happen will be swift. (p. 27)

### **Conclusion**

Same-sex marriage does not allow more people access to marriage but actually redefines marriage and the family for everyone. It says the complementarity of husband and wife, mother and father are merely optional. Male and female are meaningless, interchangeable parts. Same-sex marriage turns marriage into something it has never been in any other human civilization at any time in history. Natural marriage comprises much more than love between people and access to legal and health benefits. The same-sex proposition robs marriage of its unique virtue in bringing men and women into cooperative relationship where they complete one another in their differences. Every natural, monogamous marriage is a declaration to all society that male and female matter.

Marriage is also the best way to ensure that children grow up with a mother and father. But same-sex marriage advocates say none of that matters, and they want to forever change everyone's understanding of marriage and family. What is more, the argument the same-sex advocates use is the same argument that will make way for any type of "marriage." The impact this will have on children, women, business and the government will be staggering.... (p. 31)

### **Isn't This Primarily An Issue of Justice?**

**Question 1. But surely gays have the same right to marry as heterosexuals, don't they?**

**Answer.** Let's be very clear. Homosexuals *do* have the constitutional right to marry. But, no one has the right to redefine marriage for themselves or for a whole society. No one has the right to say male and female, mothers and fathers, don't matter for society and the family. But this is exactly what giving social and legal sanction to same-sex marriage would do.

Many homosexuals have indeed married members of the opposite sex, and no homosexual has ever charged any state or federal government with barring him or her from marrying because of their own sexual preference. It has never happened. The state is blind to such matters of personal orientation. There are some very basic legal parameters as to who any of us can marry, and they apply equally to all of us. This satisfies the “equal protection” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Traditionally, when any of us seeks a marriage license, we

- can’t already be married
- must be an adult and must marry an adult
- can’t marry a close family member
- must marry someone of the opposite sex

Now if two people meeting all these criteria go to city hall to get a marriage license, and the clerk asks whether either are homosexual and denies them a marriage license based on an affirmative answer, that would be discriminatory. Current law does not keep homosexual individuals from marrying. It just keeps them—as well as heterosexuals—from redefining marriage by marrying a person of the same sex. Our current marriage laws treat everyone equally.

This debate isn’t about equality or access to marriage; it’s about *redefining* marriage, making it something it has never been before. (pp. 32-33)

**Question 2. Heterosexuals can marry according to their sexual orientation. Why shouldn’t homosexuals be allowed to marry according to their orientation?**

**Answer.** This argument compares apples with oranges. The assertion rests on an immense, unproven theory that homosexuality is rooted in nature just as heterosexuality is.

Historically, heterosexuality has never been considered an orientation. It was only when homosexuality gained political legitimacy that we started referring to sexual “orientations.” People have always been understood to be heterosexual even if some people want to have sex with members of the same sex. Being *gay* is more of a political description than a psychosexual one. And it is a relatively new term. Marriage has never been defined or regulated according to orientation, one way or another.

Besides, no United States court has ever recognized and no scientific institution anywhere in the world has ever established the immutability (i.e. qualities we are born with and therefore cannot change) of homosexuality. Many scientists have tried, but none has ever succeeded. Homosexuality cannot be compared to genealogy or

ethnic heritage, which cannot be changed any more than the past can be changed.

In the early 1990s, Columbia University researchers William Byne and Bruce Parsons carefully analyzed all the major biological studies on homosexuality. Finding no studies that supported a purely biological cause for homosexuality, they found the origins of homosexual identification rooted in a “complex mosaic of biological, psychological and social/cultural factors.”<sup>8</sup> More recently, Professors Richard Friedman and Jennifer Downey, writing on the nature of sexual orientation, explain:

At clinical conferences one often hears that homosexual orientation is fixed and unmodifiable. Neither assertion is true.... [T]he assertion that homosexuality is genetic is so reductionistic that it must be dismissed out of hand as a general principle of psychology.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it is wrong to assert that heterosexual and homosexual orientations are essentially the same and should therefore be treated equally. One is firmly rooted in nature and as a result is manifest as the foundation of all human civilizations. The other is far less common and the result of influences that are little understood and not intrinsic to human nature.<sup>10</sup> (pp.33-34)

**Question 7. Isn’t marriage an inherently religious institution that adheres to very narrow prohibitions? Shouldn’t marriage be set free from the restrictions of the church?**

**Answer.** When we think of weddings, we think of churches. When we think of marriage licenses, we think of city hall. Both church and state have a stake in marriage. *Churches* are interested in making sure that marriages are healthy and strong. But city hall—as well as both state and federal governments—have a huge stake in marriage as well. As Maggie Gallaheer explains, “There is scarcely a dollar that state and federal government spends on social programs that is not driven in large part by family fragmentation: crime, poverty, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, school failure, mental and physical health problems.”<sup>11</sup>

Marriage provides many benefits for society, like healthier people; more productive, law-abiding citizens; healthier, more well-adjusted children who do better in and complete school, and don’t get involved in criminal and antisocial behavior (See chapters 8-9 [p.95-111]). When marriages fail, they fail to provide those good things essential to healthy society, and the state must prop up the decline. So both church and state do have a stake in marriage, each for their own reasons. Marriage doesn’t belong just to religious institutions.

But it is also important to remember that in the history of human culture, marriage didn't arise because some government or religious institution dictated that people must marry. Marriage predates both the organized church and the state.<sup>12</sup> God rooted it in all of human nature. Therefore, it isn't the job of either the church or the state to redefine marriage to accommodate the current preferences of some individuals. Rather it is in the interest of both the church and state to preserve marriage in its given and natural form. Both must therefore support and champion natural marriage.... (pp. 39-40)

**Question 8. Haven't historians of early Christianity found same-sex marriage ceremonies being practiced in ancient Christian times?**

**Answer.** There is one historian, John Boswell, who got a good deal of press on this issue in the early 1990s. Asserting that homosexual unions were ritually honored in the medieval Christian church, Boswell got rave reviews from some newspapers and the popular press. But his work on this thesis has not been favorably reviewed by any historian of antiquity.

Boswell explains that the early church practiced ritualized ceremonies in which two men or two women entered into brotherhood and sisterhood relationships. And this is largely true. But Boswell errs when he makes the leap of equating these friendship ceremonies with the recognition and blessing of erotic homosexual relationships.

A professor of early Christian history, panning Boswell's book in the journal *First Things*, explains, "Nine years ago I was joined in devout sisterhood to another woman, apparently in just such a ceremony as Boswell claims to elucidate in his book." She explains the ceremony was performed in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by an Orthodox archbishop. The other woman was not the professor's lover but her professional colleague and friend, another professor of history. Upon meeting the women in the midst of their Middle East tour, the archbishop remarked the ladies must be very good friends since they "had survived the rigors of Syria and Eastern Turkey in amicable good humor" and offered a ceremonial blessing on such a special friendship.<sup>13</sup> They were honored to have their sisterhood blessed in such a special way. These friendship ceremonies have long been a part of certain Christian traditions.

The professor goes on to explain that Boswell's scholarship "is studded with unwarranted *a priori* assumptions, with arguments from silence and dubious, or in some cases outrageously false, translations of critical terms." She warns that Boswell's slipperiness

with historical accuracy and principles of interpretation "would be unacceptable in an undergraduate paper." She gives the example where Boswell says, "Certainly the most controversial same-sex couple in the Christian tradition comprised Jesus and John" on the basis of Christ calling John his "beloved disciple."<sup>14</sup>

John Boswell cannot be taken seriously as a reasonable historian. (pp. 40-42)

**Question 9. But if most religions object to same-sex marriage, can't we just allow civil same-sex marriage and let churches do what they want?**

**Answer.** We think not. If same-sex marriage is seen as a fundamental human right by the United States Supreme Court—as the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court found in its infamous *Goodridge* decision—then all citizens will be forced to recognize it. A just society can't be selective about which groups will recognize fundamental human rights. If they are basic or fundamental, everyone must recognize them.

Only months after legalizing same-sex "marriage" in Canada, activists there successfully passed C-250, a bill criminalizing public statements that could be deemed "hateful" to homosexuals, punishable by up to two years in prison!<sup>15</sup> Say the wrong thing; go to jail. Churches in Canada cannot speak against homosexuality without fear of punishment. The same could happen here.

Every public school in the nation, K-12, will no doubt be compelled to teach that same-sex "marriage" and homosexuality are perfectly normal. Pictures and story lines in textbooks also will most likely be changed to show same-sex couples as normal. If the right to same-sex marriage is identical to civil rights, then we should expect the same kind of governmental enforcement of the law.

Your church could very well be pressured to perform same-sex weddings or lose some or all of its privileges. When courts find same-sex marriage to be a constitutional and fundamental human right, the American Civil Liberties Union can convincingly argue that the government is underwriting discrimination by offering tax exemptions to churches and synagogues that only honor natural marriage. It could happen in every state in the union.

Gay and lesbian people have a right to form meaningful relationships. They don't have a right to redefine marriage for all of us. *If same-sex marriage is legalized in America, all citizens will be affected by this shift in the civil and religious meaning of marriage.* Furthermore, protection of your religious right to live out your faith in public by voicing moral criticism of

this arrangement would be seriously eroded if not eliminated. (pp. 42-43)

**Question 10. But some believe that same-sex marriage could actually strengthen the institution of marriage. Isn't this true?**

**Answer.** Wouldn't that be a bit like saying printing counterfeit money would help strengthen the economy by putting more dollars into circulation? Marriage is not the creation of human beings; thus it is not our province to change it. It doesn't thrive under the inclusive banner of "the more the merrier." A marriage culture, which is essential to a healthy society, is nourished when we are faithful to and honor its time-tested definition, which is simply not elastic.

In addition, recent research from a major British medical journal on male same-sex relationships in the Netherlands—arguably one of the most gay-friendly cultures in the world (and where same-sex marriage is legal)—indicates gay men have a very difficult time living by the values of marriage. This study found that, on average, steady homosexual relationships in the city of Amsterdam last only 1.5 years. The study also found that gay men in steady relationships there have an average of eight partners a year outside of their current relationships.<sup>16</sup> And remember the attitude of the first couple in line on May 17, 2004, to get a same-sex marriage license in Provincetown, Massachusetts. They admitted to having an open marriage.

Contrast that with the fact that 67 percent of first marriages in the United States last ten years, and more than three-quarters of heterosexual married couples report being faithful to their wedding vows.<sup>17</sup>

Some same-sex marriage apologists explain that if homosexuals had the social pull of marriage to keep them monogamous like heterosexuals do, then they would be more monogamous like heterosexuals. But data like that from Amsterdam exposes this as wishful thinking. In addition, an article in *OUT* magazine quotes a thirty-two-year-old gay man as a normative gay voice on the question of the virtue of marriage and monogamy: "As far as the legalities and financial aspects, yes, I'd definitely get married. But would that make me monogamous? No way. I think it's silly for anyone, straight or gay, to define it that way."<sup>18</sup>

No, opening marriage to people who simply want to the benefits it provides and little else does not strengthen marriage. (pp. 43-44)

## **How Would Homosexual Marriage Threaten Other Families?**

**Question 1. If someone I know says he's a homosexual and he wants to marry his partner, how does that threaten my heterosexual marriage and family?**

**Answer.** If this were just about his family, then you might have a point. It may not have any substantial negative impact. But this public debate for same-sex marriage isn't just about a few different kinds of marriage here or there. It is about asking *every one* of us to radically change our own understanding of marriage forever.

If marriage were truly a private affair, which it is not, then same-sex marriage would have little impact on anyone's family. But marriage is just as much about the community as it is about individuals, perhaps more so. That's why marriages are public ceremonies, whether in churches or before civil authorities, and are regulated by laws. Marriage is a societal agreement.

*No marriage is an island.* Every marriage touches the community as a universally human community norm—a rule embraced by society for how we conduct ourselves sexually and domestically, and what we provide for children to meet their developmental needs. And every society must have a norm for what it expects and what it will *not* allow. Marriage is that social norm for the family. As humans, we are all connected and our decisions and actions—both public and private—*do* affect other people, even if it is indirect and not always evident. There are no truly private marriages.

Every healthy marriage proclaims to the community that men and women

- need and complete each other in their differences
- should be faithful to one another sexually and emotionally
- have a duty to look out for each other's welfare
- share a commitment to bear and cooperatively raise the next generation

Marriage is also a statement to the community that a man must commit himself to one woman, to care for her as selflessly as he can, and support and care for the children that he sires with his wife. The decline of marriage over the past few decades has reduced the number of men who are helping women raise their children, creating widespread fatherlessness, one of our nation's most urgent social problems.<sup>19</sup> Same-sex marriage likely will contribute to this decline, even among heterosexual men. Won't lesbian families send the message to men that fathers are optional and lead men to increasingly see themselves that way? Gay male families tell us that a man committing himself to one woman is simply one lifestyle choice among many. So, men committing themselves to women will become

increasingly optional. This is not good for men, and it won't be good for women or their children. (pp. 54-55)

### **Question 2. How could same-sex marriage harm my children?**

**Answer.** Same-sex marriage teaches children and their generation that marriage is merely about fulfilling adult sexual and emotional desire, nothing more. Many approaches to and philosophies of heterosexual marriage already teach this, and same-sex marriage will only help solidify it.

Same-sex marriage—like easy divorce, cohabitation pre-and extramarital sex, and unmarried childbearing—relativizes family relationships. It promotes a smorgasbord mentality for family life: choose what suits your tastes, and one choice is as good as another. But no society has ever been able to sustain itself with such a view of family life.

Same-sex marriage will teach little boys that the idea of being a good family man—caring and sacrificing himself for one woman and their children—is not expected or even virtuous, but merely one lifestyle choice among many. Same-sex marriage teaches our daughters that being committed to and helping socialize a husband and bearing and raising children with him is also only one family lifestyle choice among many.

In short the entire meaning and significance of marriage itself, and what it means to be male and female, will be radically changed. So will the choices and behaviors of those who grow up within that altered social context. (pp. 55-56)

### **Question 3. How does same-sex marriage harm our understanding of humanity?**

**Answer.** In some very profound and harmful ways.

*Wife* and *husband* become mere words we use to describe people in a relationship. They lose any vital meaning. In fact, marriage license clerks in Massachusetts have been instructed to start referring to people getting marriage as “Party A” and “Party B.”<sup>20</sup> Thus the deep meaning of *husband* and *wife* are evacuated. With “Party A, you may now kiss Party B,” our sons and daughters will miss the fact that men and women are uniquely completed and fulfilled when they love and commit to the “otherness” of male and female in marriage.

Mother and father become merely androgynous people engaged in the act of caring for kids. *Mother* and *father* become mere sentimental words used to address parents—not something special that men and women, as

parents, *are*. Any apparent differences become merely superficial and of no practical consequence. In fact, saying children need mothers and fathers could become hate speech because it indicts same-sex families.

The terms *male* and *female* are emptied of significance. We exchange our appreciation of humanity, understood as the treasures of being male and female, for a “Mr. Potato Head” theory of humanity (same shell, interchangeable exterior parts!). The same-sex marriage proposition cannot tolerate any necessary, fundamental differences between the genders. If there were necessary difference, male and female would need each other and *every* same-sex family would be humanly incomplete. *Gender* in a society that accepts same-sex marriage can only refer to meaningless, impersonal, interchangeable parts. A socially equal—and not just tolerated—same-sex marriage does damage at the very fundamental level. In fact, *granting moral equality to even one same-sex marriage diminishes all of us at the very core of our humanity.*

The significance of gender is demolished by the essence of same-sex marriage. Once it is made morally equal to natural marriage it will diminish the femininity of every woman. There will be minimal differences of men and women left over, and they are purely physiological. A woman's surrogate womb becomes the only part of femininity that is needed to create a male same-sex family. A woman is reduced to a womb and its practical function and this is a horrible message to send to women and girls. Reducing gender to physiology is, well, dehumanizing.

Similarly, one lesbian same-sex marriage—once it is seen as morally equal to natural marriage—will diminish the masculinity of every man, for the only thing important about manhood will be sperm. This is a bad message to send to men and boys. They are reduced to being impersonal parts—things, not persons. Both views are deeply antihuman because they are deeply anti-male and -female.

This turn in our understanding of gender will create far more—rather than less—confusion within us as individuals and dissension among us in our relationships with others; it will not allow us to be true to our respective genders—who we really are! Same-sex marriage deconstructs our humanity as expressed in our masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity become morally, personally and interpersonally meaningless. (pp. 56-57)

## How Does Marriage Benefit Adults?

**Question 2. In what specific areas of life do male-female marriages benefit adults?**

**Answer.** Let's start with how it leads to a longer, healthier life.

Unmarried people have lower activity levels, and they spend twice as much time as patients in hospitals as their married peers.<sup>21</sup> Research conducted at Erasmus University in Rotterdam reports that "married people have the lowest morbidity [illness] rates, while the divorced show the highest."<sup>22</sup> Professor Linda Waite of the University of Chicago finds that the "relationship between marriage and death rates has now reached the status of a truism, having been observed across numerous societies and among various social and demographic groups."<sup>23</sup>

In Waite's 1995 presidential address to the Population Association of America, she explained that the health benefits of marriage are so strong that a married man with heart disease can be expected to live, on average, 1,400 days longer (nearly four years) than an unmarried man with a healthy heart. This longer life expectancy is even greater for a married man who has cancer or is twenty pounds overweight compared to his healthy but unmarried counterpart. Being unmarried will shave more days off a woman's life than being married and having cancer, being twenty pounds overweight or having a low socioeconomic status. Additional research from Yale University indicates that a married man who smokes more than a pack a day can be expected to live as long as a divorced man who does not smoke. This researcher explains with a touch of humor, "If a man's marriage is driving him to heavy smoking, he has a delicate statistical decision to make."<sup>24</sup>

Robert Coombs's research agrees with these findings: "Virtually every study of mortality and marital status shows the unmarried of both sexes have higher death rates, whether by accident, disease, or self-inflicted wounds, and this is found in every country that maintains accurate health statistics."<sup>25</sup>

Research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* finds that cures for cancer are significantly more successful (8 to 17 percent) when a patient is married, and being married was comparable to being in an age category ten years younger.<sup>26</sup>

Marriage is more than just an emotional relationship. It is a very real fountain of youth. (pp. 97-98)

## How Does Marriage Benefit Children?

**Question 1. Marriage provides benefits to the man and woman who are married, but does it provide real benefits to children?**

**Answer.** All things being equal, children with married parents consistently do better in every measure of well-being than their peers in any other type of family arrangement. And this is a stronger indicator of well-being than the race, economic or educational status of parents, or of the neighborhood in which these children grow up. The research supporting these conclusions is very robust.

Pitirim Sorokin, founder and first chair of the sociology department at Harvard University, proclaimed the importance of married mothers and fathers some sixty years ago:

The most essential sociocultural patterning of a newborn human organism is achieved by the family. It is the first and most efficient sculptor of human material, shaping the physical, behavioral, mental, moral and sociocultural characteristics of practically every individual...From remotest past, married parents have been the most effective teachers of their children.<sup>27</sup>

Research over the past few decades only confirms this idea. The child advocacy organization *Center for Law and Social Policy* (CLASP) recently reported: "Most researchers now agree that...studies support the notion that, on average, children do best when raised by their two married biological parents."<sup>28</sup> *Child Trends* also reports: "An extensive body of research tells us that children do best when they grow up with both biological parents."<sup>29</sup> (pp. 103-104)

**Question 2. Specifically, how do children benefit when they grow up with their biological mothers and fathers?**

**Answer.** Sara McLanahan of Princeton University, one of the world's leading scholars on how family formation affects child well-being, finds that regardless of which survey we look at, children raised with only one biological parent are about twice as likely to drop out of school as children being raised with two biological parents.<sup>30</sup> Children from married two-parent families, on average, have test scores and grade-point averages that are higher, they miss fewer school days, and they have greater expectations of attending college than children living with one parent. Additionally, of those from either type of family who do attend college, those from biological two-parent families are 7 to 20 percent more likely to finish college.<sup>31</sup>

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Children from divorced homes are 70 percent more likely than those living with biological parents to be expelled or suspended from school. Those living with never-married mothers are twice as likely to be expelled or suspended. In addition, children who don't live with both biological parents are significantly more likely to require parent-teacher meetings to deal with performance or behavior problems than those who live with married parents.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, young men without married parents are 1.5 times more likely than those with married parents to be out of school and out of work. Young girls without married parents are twice as likely to be out of school and not working.<sup>33</sup>(pp. 104-105)

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