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Helena Strange
Justice and Electoral Select Committee
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Dear Ms Strange

*Submission to the Justice and Electoral Committee on
the Civil Union Bill and the Relationships (Statutory References) Bill*

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The Student Christian Movement, established and affiliated in 1897 to the World Student Christian Federation, which has been granted UNESCO and UN observer status. The organisation has always been a body of university students committed to intelligent thought, comment and action concerning contemporary issues from a Christian perspective.

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SCM Seal

Contents:

- 0 Summary of Reasons
- 1 Introduction
- 2 Same-sex Families
- 3 Male/female Gender Complimentarity
- 4 Proposed Alterations
- 5 Conclusions
- Appendix 1 “*Annual Psychology Review*” on Same-sex Families
- Appendix 2 “Christian Theology on Sexuality & Marriage” Stuart J Bradshaw

0 Summary reasons for supporting the Bills

0.1 Pursuant to the intention of the NZBill of Rights Act 1990, the evidential onus rests on those who would maintain distinctions/lawful satisfying the proof that these legal distinctions are **not** arbitrary or unreasonable in a democratic society.

0.2.1 Opposition to the Bills must prove that there is a significant difference between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Any difference would be measurable **only** through the observed effect on children raised in the two comparable family structures. Research into relationship duration and health erroneously compare those within the stability of marriage to those without, thus begging the question. The semantic tautology that only mothers/females can mother/role-model feminine behaviour is invalid / a mere doubling of words.

0.2.2 Research would have to exclude confounding variables from the parents which render the two groups incomparable, such as maladjustment/psychological disorder as a result of their own childhood abuse and assault. Research should use very large sample sizes and standardised tests to be valid, since ideological bias is common in this area to both sides of the debate.^{1 2}

0.2.3 Data showing the detrimental effects on children from divorce/marital discord/traumatic separation from a parent, or the results of economic/time constraints in single-parent homes, describe **only** these situations.

0.2.4 The vast majority of two decades of research has found no systematic difference between the two groups of children.³ The results cover comprehensive outcomes of emotional functioning, sexual preference, stigmatisation, gender role behaviour, behavioural adjustment, gender identity and cognitive functioning.⁴

0.2.5 One study, however, showed that children from same-sex homes were more likely to exhibit liberal attitudes toward sexual activity and gender-conforming behaviour, while remaining heterosexual.⁵ Young men felt less societal pressure to conform to a 'macho' stereotype, and were more secure and openly communicative when becoming sexually active. They were not adverse to the possibility of relationships with the same-sex, though ultimately identified as heterosexual. Opinions from a morally conservative perspective have understandably reported the same as 'confused over gender identity' or 'increased promiscuity and experimentation'.

0.3.1 Failing the support of empirical evidence to demonstrate a significant difference in outcomes, a considerable weight rests on human tradition, and mere routine is often arbitrary and unreasonable.

0.3.2 The Judeo-Christian Tradition, though, is a deeply embedded thought system in all Western democratic culture. It's central belief being that meaning cannot be deduced from matter/biology/existence alone but requires reference to the will/nature of God. The early history of the relationship between humankind and God is recorded in Scripture. Christianity believes that Christ revealed the nature of God as Trinitarian.

0.3.3 Current theology, such as that of Archbishop of Canterbury (ecclesial head of worldwide Anglican Church) Rev Dr Rowan Williams, believes that central doctrine supports a concept of marriage and sexuality that

¹ Stacey, J Biblarz, T J "How does the sexual orientation of parents matter?" *American Sociological Review* April 2001 66 159-183

² Lerner and Nagai, "No Basis: What the Studies Don't Tell Us About Same-Sex Parenting" *Marriage Law Project*, 2000

³ Our literature search covered the three largest and most used databases: Medline, PubMed, and PsychInfo. see Appendix 1 & Anderson N, Amlie C, Ytteny EA "Outcomes for children with lesbian or gay parents: A review of studies from 1978 to 2000" *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 2002 Sep 43(4) 335-351 paper reviewed 3 U.K., 18 U.S.A & 2 European studies

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Above fn 1

includes same-sex persons.⁶ Any disagreement is actually over the contemporary application and authority of cultural norms recorded in this historical document. Slavery, the subjugation of women, cultural genocide, forced conversion, forbidden interest accrual, autocratic governance, capital punishment, dress and diet codes, all have been discarded.

0.4 Government should provide for the parallel registration/declaration/non-discrimination of couples who do not identify with the Christian religion, while maintaining a distinction of terminology that allows communities to nominally affirm or deny the moral/social legitimacy of legal couples in accordance with their personal beliefs.

⁶ Appendix 2

1 Introduction

We are aware that the Select Committee is likely to receive a considerable quantity of material speaking from religious perspectives. The specialist terminology and traditional metaphor of the Judeo-Christian tradition can be over-whelming. The passion of many submissions may obscure a limited understanding of Church history and Theology. Some conservative submissions, silent on their motivational belief and religious traditions, rely on large quantities of statistical data ignorant of biased inference, incorrect statistical interpretation and misrepresented data.

1.2 Submissions opposing the Bills are likely to present an argument that can be summarized into a simple paragraph:⁷

'The legal distinction between sexual relationships is based on their utilitarian value and benefit to society and should not be based on the belief of human dignity or collective and individual autonomy as expressed in Human Rights language. The benefits of heterosexual marriages are stability and wellbeing best created through the interaction of a male and female in a long-term relationship. Only the complimentary psychological interplay of two opposite genders as well as their gender role-modeling can sustain this stable environment and the rearing of normal children.' [not a quotation]

1.3 Although adoption and child-rearing by same-sex couples is not dealt with by the bills, this area of concern is clearly the most central point of arguments against the Bills.

1.4 The second being that the perceptions and behaviour of men and women are significantly different, and that the resulting interaction between them in relationship produces the most stability and psychological well-being.

This submission is mostly a critique of these two central ideas encapsulated above.

Supporting details are provided or cited in the two Appendices.

1.6 The **First Appendix** is two pages from the "Annual Review of Psychology" Feb 2004 Vol 55, summarising the conclusions of current research into child-rearing by same-sex couples. It is an internationally edited and prestigious annual review of the relevant studies, and the empirical evidence is overwhelmingly supportive of same-sex parenting and notes that it is probably societal acceptance of these family types that could facilitate or disrupt the successful adaptation of children.

1.7 The **Second Appendix** explores the current theological understanding of sexuality and marriage (**p16-18 are the most significant**). Both gender complementarity and natural biology as a basis for sexual/relationship ethics are rejected in favour of the orthodox/traditional Christian understanding of God as Trinity. The Appendix contains a referenced bibliography and relies heavily on the thought of Rev. Rowan Williams, the current Archbishop of Canterbury (ecclesial head of the worldwide Anglican church). Only a narrow and selective reading of Christian scripture and history could support the exclusive ideal of the heterosexual relationship and nuclear family. The freedom of a community to recognize and support **all** the loving relationships in its midst, encouraging the selfless contribution of stable relationships to society, reflects the core of Christian belief. The continued exclusion of same-sex couples from full recognition and participation in society promotes an inward-looking and self-centred conception of sexual relationships.

⁷Summarised from the opposing reasons of the Maxim Institute, a conservative think-tank largely financed and staffed by evangelical Christian concerns, refer http://www.maxim.org.nz/xcu/cu_10reasons.html

2 Same-sex Families

2.1 Members of the Select Committee will no doubt hear plenty of statistics. What is not conveyed are important factors such as study design and sample sizing. The low statistical power of small samples increases the risk of failing to reject false conclusions (null hypothesis) and is a common failing of research in this area, according to researchers themselves.⁸ Facts have never been able to speak for themselves and by necessity involve interpretation. Interpretative bias is evident when causal connections are inferred from data that cannot prove or disprove those conclusions. Data on promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, domestic violence, sexual abuse and relationship duration indicate general behaviour and incidence. However they cannot be used to discredit relationship types.

2.2 A high incidence of promiscuity and sexually transmitted disease among **heterosexuals** could indicate unfaithfulness and unstable relationships, but would **not** mean that heterosexual relationships are inherently pathological

2.3 An example of data which invites false conclusions first glance is that indicating an increased incidence of domestic violence in same-sex couple relationships.⁹ Yet the study comparison was between violence in transient homosexual co-habitation versus marriage **and** stable heterosexual co-habitation. The comparison between temporary and long-term relationships introduces a systematic bias in study design. The study found no comparatively higher risk in lesbian relationships, proving what such data actually supports: Not the discrediting of gay relationships, but the fact that men, both gay and heterosexual, are the main perpetrators of violence and alcohol abuse. The research reported not only an increased rate of assaults within same-sex relationships but also increased assaults by **all** adults and strangers. The population was sampled from Colorado state, USA, a notoriously religious-conservative area with a large rural population, hostile to same-sex relationships.

2.4 This is especially true in data used to argue a causal relationship between childhood sexual abuse and the ‘formation’ of same-sex orientation. Not only is such a causal relationship negated by the countless heterosexual adults who experienced sexual abuse during their childhood, but recent research shows that it is the **prior expression of gender atypical behaviour by any child that risks parental abuse**.¹⁰ This U.S.A. population based study of 3,000 people from 25-74 yo of both hetero- and homosexual orientation discovered same sex orientation in boys or the expression of behaviour not seen as stereotypically masculine, was a significant risk factor for experiencing childhood parental maltreatment.

2.5 Statistics indicating the plight of children from single parent and divorced homes are erroneously used to argue the preference for two, preferably opposite sex, parents within a family. What they actually show are the unfortunate effects of instability, economic pressure and domestic discord in these situations.

2.6 The current **research shows that children who grow up with one or two gay/lesbian parents fair just as well** in emotional, cognitive, social and sexual functioning as do children who’s parents are heterosexual.¹¹ The only difference that researchers found was a likelihood to consider the development of sexual orientation (gay or heterosexual) as flexible and healthy. Researchers found that **“...optimal child development seems influenced more by the nature of the relationships and interaction within the family unit than by the particular structural form it takes”**. The sexual orientation and gender of the parents are not significant, the “child’s emotional security derives from the quality of the parents’ relationship with each other.”¹²

⁸ Schumann, U R “What was really learnt from Tooker&Golombok’s 1995 study of lesbian and single parent mothers?” *Psychology Report* 2004 Apr 94(2) 422-444

⁹ Tjaden P, Thoennes N, Allison CJ “Increased risk of domestic violence in same-sex couple relationships” *Violence&Victims* 1999 Winter 14(4) 413-425

¹⁰ “Reports of parental maltreatment during childhood” *Child Abuse Neglect* 2002 Nov 26(11) 1165-78

¹¹ ” Committee on Psychosocial aspects of Child and Family Health & Perrin EC “Co-parent or second-parent adoption by same-sex parents” *Pediatrics* 2002 Feb 109(2) 339-340

¹² Cummings EM et al, “*Interparental relations as a dimension of parenting*” in “Parenting the Child’s World” Barkowski JG ed, Erlbaum p251-264

2.7 Over two decades of internationally peer reviewed research with high statistical power agrees with the above. A study of the 23 best studies from 1978 to 2000 covering 615 children from same-sex homes alongside 387 controls (heterosexual homes), and using standardised psychological tests, questionnaires and interviews, discovered no systematic difference between the two groups and no adverse outcomes. The outcomes determined were emotional functioning, sexual preference, stigmatisation, gender role behaviour, behavioural adjustment, gender identity and cognitive functioning. **Under every outcome there was no difference between children raised by same-sex couples or heterosexual couples.**¹³

2.8 One study, however, showed that children from same-sex homes were more likely to exhibit liberal attitudes toward sexual activity and gender-conforming behaviour, while remaining heterosexual.¹⁴ Young men felt less societal pressure to conform to a ‘macho’ stereotype, and were more secure and openly communicative when becoming sexually active. They were not adverse to the possibility of relationships with the same-sex, though ultimately identified as heterosexual. Opinions from a morally conservative perspective have understandably reported the same as ‘confused over gender identity’ or ‘increased promiscuity and experimentation’. The same study showed that trend toward increased incidence of gay parenting or of same-sex orientation, though this is not often reported from conservative sources keen to claim that gay parenting will produce more gay children.

3 Gender Complementarity

3.1 The idea that each sex “refines, balances and completes the other”¹⁵, a staple of pop-psychology (“Men are from Mars, Women from Venus” rhetoric) has been around since the Greek philosopher Plato, for thousands of years. Particularly the idea that each sex is romantically seeking their other half. Even its modern twist cannot hide the inherent hierarchy of one gender over the other (male or female, dependant on who’s reading the text) and the dismissal of single persons as whole and balances individuals. Modern psychology, on the other hand, shows that social construction, or the meanings, language, and behaviour we are instructed in from a young age significantly dictate our way of thinking and interacting. The meaning of feminine and the behaviour of women has certainly altered through changes in fashion and public expectation.

3.2 These same arguments have in the past been used to deny women the opportunity for self-determined and full participation in all sectors of society. They are still as flawed today, even more so since the division of domestic labour, personal interests and career no longer fall along the gender expectations of 1950’s society. **The modern New Zealand couple shares child-rearing roles and domestic labour along boundaries that have little to do with their sex, and more to do with personal skill and practicality.**

3.3 The challenge, unmet so far, is to show that men and women are inherently different in a way that is significant to child-rearing as well as interpersonal relationships.¹⁶ While there are clearly biological differences these do **not** equate to behavioural differences. Is it possible to describe the significant differences in maternal and paternal instinct which go beyond pregnancy and breastfeeding? No

3.4 Human behaviour is the result of an interaction between external/environmental factors such as parental care, and personal psychological and physical development. Very importantly our society has shown a clear ability to alter the fluid meanings of fixed biological bodies. The value and purpose of children, women, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, all have gone through considerable change over the last century through recognizing the inherent dignity in humankind. Society, through its language and traditions, determines what bodies mean, **not** biological facts.

¹³ Anderson N, Amlie C, Ytteny EA “Outcomes for children with lesbian or gay parents: A review of studies from 1978 to 2000” *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 2002 Sep 43(4) 335-351

3 U.K., 18 U.S.A & 2 European studies were reviewed

¹⁴ Above fn 1

¹⁵ http://www.maxim.org.nz/xcu/cu_10reasons.html

¹⁶ Appendix 1

3.5 The idea of **gender complementarity has its basis in Greek mythology and crude biological deduction** (tab A into slot B rhetoric which is unable to determine, for instance, the purpose/meaning of the mouth: eating, speaking, or kissing, ...or piercing or painting). It has **no basis in contemporary psychological research¹⁷ and less in Christian theology**. Particularly since Christian ethics is based on the premise that human kind is called to live as a reflection of the Divine Likeness.

3.6 Christian theology perceives God as Trinity. God and human kind are not the compliment to each other, since this would make God dependent on human existence and activity. The three Persons of the **Trinity/Christian God do not demonstrate a dualistic complementary interaction, but an interdependency and selfless giving within a reciprocating community**. The Christian idea of God is reflected in the free choice of one to love another, and that the selfless giving of one for another is affirmed by a third, being the community. **Reflecting God is not the exclusive domain of married couples, but of the whole human community. No couple relationship can survive without the love and support of friends/family/community.**

3.7 Sexual attraction, any yearning, is a desire for difference/change/an 'Other', yet there is such a thing as same-sex desire. This very fact demonstrates that **the difference or otherliness of a sexual partner is about something else than what genitals or gendered behaviour we exhibit**. The spark of sexual attraction that is nurtured into a committed love and caring for the well-being of another is clearly about more than physical distinctions, however inexpressible they may be.

4 Proposed Alteration

While we have read and affirm every aspect of the proposed legislation, we do not understand the lack of provision in the Civil Union Bill for recognition of civil unions from international jurisdictions. Though their requirements and legal rights may not be as universal as marriage, they are certainly capable of expression so that legal relationships not significantly different to civil unions could satisfy statutory definitions. The distinction is irrelevant given the ability of countries such as Canada to recognize same-sex civil unions for immigration purposes.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The idea that same-sex homes are mutually exclusive to a stable and loving environment, or that children from these families are worse off has been thoroughly disproved by over two decades of modern research.

5.2 Both the ideas of gender complementarity, and the perception of child-rearing/procreation as a necessary purpose to every sexual relationship, are contrary to Christian theology. They are in fact contrary to basic Christian doctrine (disregarding God as the ultimate reference point, as when discussing biological matter that defines its own ultimate purpose/meaning). If child rearing is the purpose of marriage, then how many children is enough?...and should infertile couples be allowed to marry?...should childless couples be required to divorce after a certain period?

5.3 While it is clear that the majority of New Zealanders will regard the sex of their partner as unique, and their children as a blessing, and will give differences and the shared experience of child-rearing as reasons why they love each other, though this is not so. People are moved to love each other before they can articulate any rational reasoning for it. Partners, parents and children love each other just because they do. This unconditional and unearned love reflects that between God and humankind, which is why Christian marriage within a community is seen as symbolising a love that precedes us all. **Affirming the selfless love of a couple with no genital difference or children poses no threat to the validity of heterosexual marriage, because that validity lies in reflecting a concept of care for every individual that embraces the whole community.**

¹⁷ Appendix 1

5.4 Many submissions will view law as the public expression of societal morals and meaning. This misreads the pragmatic purpose of regulating interactions through law, when those interactions pose great cost or benefit to society. The registration of these non-commercial relationships can reduce the costs to welfare and litigation systems when certainty over protection of vulnerable partners and children are important. The system of public declaration and registration promotes accountability and community involvement as well as stability in principle.

5.5 Current theology does not support de facto relationships (the concept of isolated couples from community support and declaration) and therefore we welcome the promotion of civil unions to de facto arrangements, respecting the religious freedom of couples choosing to solemnize their commitment without adopting the language and meaning of a faith they do not identify with.

5.6 Sexual intimacy is a deeply personal expression of trust and love between two people and is very rightly a private affair. The community does have an interest in enjoying the results of stable relationships. The desire of two people to express trust, commitment, loyalty, care, concern and interdependency that desires the success and happiness of each other, clearly benefits their immediate family and friends through promoting health relationships for all, and even the nationwide community through the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the resultant economic stability and efficient resource management.

5.7 This is why **families, friendship circles, communities and religious groups should be allowed the freedom to publicly recognise and affirm the contribution of every sexual couple, when that couple chooses to declare their commitment**, obviously becoming publicly accountable. It is understandable that this freedom should come under the neutral term of civil union given our pluralistic society, though SCM hopes for the eventual recognition of same-sex relationships within the Church and secular community. Coercion and force are antithetical to the Christian faith, and the Church will have to decide in its own time when it is ready to challenge its own prejudice.

5.8 **But** many good changes in society have been forced on an unwilling majority. The abolishment of slavery, desegregation of races, vote for women, and the freedom of religious association are all examples where the reality of democratic politics do not excuse legislators from designing policy and laws that serve **all** citizens, and that especially protect those made vulnerable by the blunt rule of majority public opinion (often anxious and ill-informed).

5.9 This is not special rights, a term designed to inflame the resentment of citizens who erroneously perceive minority status or the extension of human rights law as granting opportunities that they are excluded from. These bills do not grant extra rights, they just remove detrimental, arbitrary and unreasonable distinctions that prevent the equal opportunity of all citizens to participate in a free and democratic society.

Development in the Family: Gay and Lesbian Couples (How do Children in Same-sex households fare?)

<http://psych.annualreviews.org> also available through MedLine database

Gay and Lesbian Couples: How Do Children in Same-Sex Households Fare?

One of the new trends in family research is the exploration of gay and lesbian families and the input of these families on children's development. Recent estimates suggest that there are between one and five million lesbian and gay parents in the United States, with the lower numbers derived from the most conservative assessments on the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs). The higher estimates are based on the more liberal assessments used in the NHSLs and on voter exit polls ([Badgett 1998](#), [Patterson & Friel 2000](#)). Regardless of the estimate, it is evident that a larger number of children are growing up in gay or lesbian families.

There are several reasons for scholarly interest in the issue of gay and lesbian parenting. First, a better understanding is needed as a guide to legal and public policy decisions. Evaluation of assumptions concerning the fitness of lesbian and gay individuals to be parents as well as careful evaluation of the impact of same-gender parenting on children are both reasons for this line of inquiry. A further rationale for this work is theoretical, since the recent research on the development of children in gay and lesbian families is another way to assess the uniqueness and necessity of rearing children in homes with both male and female parents. Silverstein has framed this debate in a provocative but helpful way by questioning whether fathers are essential for the successful socialization of children ([Silverstein 2002](#)). Similarly, [Golombok \(2000\)](#) has raised the question of whether gender of parent is critical for successful child outcomes or whether a set of gender-neutral characteristics, such as nurturance, protection, and guidance, are more critical ingredients for parental competence. Part of the evidence that is relevant to the debate about the essential father stems from recent work by [Patterson \(2002\)](#) indicating that the development of children raised by lesbian and gay parents is well within normal limits. Work by [Flaks et al. \(1995\)](#) substantiates this picture: Children in heterosexual and lesbian families were not very different in terms of their developmental outcomes.

However, it seems premature to conclude that fathers are replaceable based on this evidence. Studies have relied largely on small samples of highly educated individuals in stable relationships. Furthermore, two other key issues need to be addressed in ongoing work. More needs to be understood about the extent to which role division in lesbian families approximates role division in heterosexual families, and more needs to be understood about the degree to which lesbian couples expose their children to male role models. In the first case, evidence suggests that lesbian couples share household tasks and decision-making responsibilities more equally than do heterosexual couples ([Patterson 2002](#)). At the same time, however, lesbian biological mothers viewed their parental role as more salient than either nonbiological lesbian mothers or heterosexual mothers ([Hand 1991](#)). Moreover, despite the more egalitarian divisions of household labor in lesbian households, there also exists some traditionality in roles. Biological lesbian mothers are more involved in child care than their partners; nonbiological lesbian mothers spent more time working outside the family ([Patterson 2002](#)). This raises the possibility that even in same-gender families, the usual role division concerning child care, which characterizes heterosexual partnerships, may be evident. Whether the nonbiological mothers enact other aspects of more traditional male roles, such as a physical play style, remains to be established. In short, children may be afforded opportunities to experience both maternal and paternal interactive styles in same-gender households.

Although the amount of research on the effects of being reared by two male parents is more limited than the work on two female parents, the available data suggest that the gender identities of children of gay fathers are similar to those of children of heterosexual fathers ([Bailey et al. 1995](#)). Moreover, as [Bozett \(1987\)](#) has reported, children develop positive relationships with their gay fathers. One important challenge faced by children of gay parents, however, is their possible stigmatization by others. An issue that requires concerted attention in this debate is the role of

social norms and attitudes toward children growing up in same-gender child-rearing unions. Beyond the theoretical plausibility of successful outcomes from this type of child-rearing arrangement, we need to pay more attention to the level of societal acceptance of these family types as a critical factor that can either facilitate or disrupt the successful adaptation of children in these families ([Patterson 2002](#)).

As is true of lesbian parents, gay parents are more likely than heterosexual couples to share child-rearing duties evenly ([McPherson 1993](#)). More information about the observed and self-reported parenting by gay fathers, such as that provided by [Silverstein \(2002\)](#), is needed, as well as assessments of the effect of these child-rearing arrangements on the children ([Patterson 2002](#)). Just as [Silverstein \(2002\)](#) questioned the essential father, these data on the effects of being reared by gay male parents raise a similar question about the essential mother and the extent to which gay couples provide differential exposure to "maternal" or feminine models and opportunities for interaction with a female partner.

This increase in gay and lesbian parents can be profitably viewed as a series of natural experiments that offer the opportunity to explore the validity of our assumptions about the critical ingredients that define successful parenting. Just as the rise in the use of day care due to the rise in women's employment has permitted valuable tests of certain important tenets of attachment theory ([Clarke-Stewart & Allhusen 2002](#)), so too should careful studies of same-gender child-rearing arrangements be viewed as opportunities for testing our theories about links between gender and parenting.

Flaks DK, Ficher I, Masterpasqua F, Joseph G. 1995. Lesbians choosing motherhood: a comparative study of lesbian and heterosexual parents and their children. *Dev. Psychol.* 29:105-14

Patterson CJ. 2002. Lesbian and gay parenthood. See [Bornstein 2002](#), 3:317-38

Bailey JM, Bobrew D, Wolfe J, Mikach S. 1995. Sexual orientation of adult sons of gay fathers. *Dev. Psychol.* 31:124-29 [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[ISI\]](#)

Bozett FW. 1987. Children of gay fathers. In *Gay and Lesbian Parents*, ed. FW Bozett, pp. 39-57 New York: Praeger

Silverstein LB. 2002. Fathers and families. See [McHale & Grolnick 2002](#), pp. 35-64

Clarke-Stewart KA, Allhusen VD. 2002. Nonparental caregiving. See [Bornstein 2002](#), 3:215-52

Christian Theology on Sexuality and Marriage

(Note: Argument crux pages 16-18)

Consensus seems unlikely when glancing at the arguments repetitively launched from the two polarised extremes conveniently labeled 'liberal' and 'conservative'. Both accuse the other of misreading the biblical text and misplaced literalism. Few would try argue against homosexuality on the bases of Levitical prohibitions or the 'sin of Sodom'; the sin of Sodom was arrogance, greed and inhospitality (Ezekiel 16:49) and the Septuagint distinguishes in translation between ritual purity and injustice proper, putting same-sex activity in the purity class, alongside prohibitions on diet and the mixing of cloth fibre. Some inflate the particularly vocational call to celibacy into a universal option, the only one available and therefore not 'optional' at all, to gay persons, while others reduce the universal to the particular and substitute a vague and permissive hermeneutic of experience and 'feeling' for the gospel challenge. Crying out 'Love' does not automatically sanctify all that is done in its name. And yet, 'love the sinner, hate the sin' has legitimised the fracturing of many persons through arrogant and patronising treatment by their church family and leaders. The most academic arguments remain over the application of Pauline texts; are liberals diluting passages when they add the litmus of 'socio-historical context' or are conservatives being conveniently selective when ignoring passages that condone slavery and servile obedience (1Timothy 6:1) while simultaneously amplifying Romans 1:26? If an exegetical tug-o-war is not your thing, then perhaps the fascinating world of natural law/morality can help.

Natural Law

Natural law is a principle developed significantly in the late twelfth century and not originally a theological concept. Urbanisation, the rising interest and study of zoology, as well as the rediscovery of classical texts and a renaissance of Late Roman law, which embraced the idea that there was a natural law known to mankind apart from legislation, refined an ethical premise based on idealised animal behaviour. Apart from its emotive force, made visceral in statements such as 'it's just unnatural (prima face immoral/abnormal)', this 'nature' is a complex philosophical construct inherited from Boethius and the twelfth century naturalists. As developed by Aquinas it stands as the antiquated touchstone of Roman Catholic sexual ethics, resorting again and again to animal behaviour as the final arbiter regarding human sexuality. Aquinas, and the Church since, extended the all-but commandment to procreate to the species as a whole, leaving celibates and sterile persons safe, but gay people still 'intrinsically disordered' by Mother Nature's yardstick. The increasing reach of genetics and psychology only make this 'natural' fallacy more technical. Circumstantial aetiology (nature arguments) cannot indicate moral inferiority by themselves, and the existence of a genetic-predisposition (nature or God-made-me-gay argument) is logically incapable of advancing any normative or ethical meaning. The existence, for example, of violent and addictive genetic predispositions would have no bearing on the unacceptability of the associated behaviour or crimes in society. Yet both liberals and conservatives erroneously want their own experience of sexuality to carry the burden of naturalness or normality.

This academic search for moral revelation in anthropology and biology is futile. Modern attempts at rescuing natural law are spent trying to prove the existence of self-evidential truths, discoverable through mental reflection. While such an exercise may uncover a body of normative values common to most cultures its normative force or ethical imperative would not be self-evident. Not only are we highly unlikely to codify this mythical body of ethics, but we cannot logically attribute its weight to majority communal agreement. It is the prior historical/cultural existence of a normative discourse that makes communal agreement possible in the first place. Established normative claims extend their validity to new claims through coherence. Therefore the search for a normative criteria to undergird our moral values, be it economic, rights based, or natural law is a deadend.

Scripture

If the communion, and indeed, Christendom is split by the homosexuality debate it won't be over such specialised arguments, though. It will be over deep seated views on the authority of Scripture and its centrality to Christian understanding. No amount of exegetical twisting could conclude anything other about Romans 1:26-27 than that Paul assumed and perpetuated a condemnation of homosexual behaviour, however much it was used in a passage to demonstrate the depravity of all mankind and the necessarily unmerited Grace of God. Although some could argue against the connection between Genesis 1 and Romans 1, Paul could very well be using a literary tool to illustrate his opinion on the result of worshiping creation rather than the Creator. However, characterising same-sex acts today as inherently lustful, promiscuous, and an act of ontological defiance is incredibly insulting to gay Christians and without any evidence whatsoever.

We have criticised the search for moral revelation in 'natural law', which leaves us turning to our cultural heritage, and as Christians this history was recorded by Jewish men. The moral/ethical framework of the Judeo-Christian Tradition is made rigid by its being recorded on paper and called Scripture. And yet the communion of believers have proved innovative and adaptable in ignoring traditions of circumcision, women leadership, divorce, interreligious dialogue, Paul's words on the divine authority given to monarchs, and his expectation of Christ's imminent return to name a few. So why do some persist in believing the scripture to be the permanent expression of the mind of God, while the circumstances which gave certain passages logic and integrity have altered. A realistic understanding of homosexual persons would resist the simplicity of Romans 1:26 and be prepared to see it as ultimately counter to the biblical message as a whole. And still there is a fear of acknowledging the flexibility with which we have always approached the bible; the way the Holy Spirit or the evil of men have always used or abused it to the Glory or shame of God.

The bible is only ink on paper, and one or two verses are noise with no meaning. Only when read and lived in the lives of believers and the church does this incredible and dynamic record of the wondering Children of God become a breathing reality. All Christian denominations have a hierarchy of value in their interpretation of scripture and we have selectively chosen where to 'interpret' the intention of God. We see Divine intent in the covenants of God with Israel, but we don't see approval of black oppression in the curse of Ham, or God's hand in the murder, rape and oppression of women, ... and perhaps not in the oppression of gay people either. To many the biblical canon of poems, prophecy, history, theological reflection, personal testimony and allegorical myth must be taken as a whole body, with the belief that scripture will correct scripture, and open the reader to God's Grace and holy living. Homosexuality must be argued for despite Paul, but not despite scripture as a whole. The Living Message defies moralistic reduction and the use of scripture to continue to oppress and punish fellow human beings is appalling.

The tensions between the local and global, the individual and community, the homosexual and heterosexual do not need solving, they need room to breath. Every healthy relationship requires a space for particularities and difference. Immaturity and arrogance are why communities are not willing to allow each other to disagree. Agreeing to disagree is a difficult tension to maintain, but what seems merely pragmatic diplomacy is lived in many relationships. Loved ones have suddenly found themselves in fundamental opposition over same-sex issues, but family and friendship often strengthen to contain this conflict. Sharing the same table (communion bread/eucharist) while differing in opinion makes for interesting dinner conversation. Mutual respect encourages understanding and permission to concretely express diverse convictions. The carefully considered move within a diocese to ordain a homosexual or female person is not disdain for the wider church, but the appropriate prerogative of a community that feels a justice delayed is justice denied.

It is difficult to move beyond the familiar angry shouting toward constructive dialogue. Anger is often an emotion born from fear, confusion and frustration so it must be asked what does the conservative

heterosexual Christian fear? Ironically a fear and confusion that is common to both sides: The threat that same-sex attraction poses to masculinity and to marriage.

Contemporary Masculinity...what's that?

Masculinity, its media portrayal and gendered roles, have undergone rapid change over the past fifty years. Since the end on the Second World War, Western femininity has adopted aspects of traditional domestic roles and powerful public ones, incorporated the fashion and behaviour of men, and claimed the autonomy to assimilate, utilize, or even parody any aspect of patriarchal society. A young girl is taught that she can be whatever she chooses, nurse or doctor, secretary or CEO, seductively feminine or a sporty tom-boy. In fact, the impossible ideal is that modern women can and should be able to morph effortlessly between multiple roles at any given moment. While not an enviable expectation, women were encouraged to sample the existing roles and styles of the male-dominated world. However, men have only uncomfortably and with embarrassment ventured into the womens'-world. There is always the risk that other men will ridicule you for engaging in the behaviour and activities of the traditionally weaker and subservient sex. The image of the modern male in advertising and movies has swung frantically back and forth through changing hairstyles and body physique to try discover and portray the ideal masculine template.ⁱ

To be fair, New Zealand is uniquely egalitarian and liberal regarding changing masculinity. Young men are spending more and more time and money at the shopping mall, hair salon and gym, and people don't mind what you do so long as your good at it. An increase in emotional vocabulary and frank conversation mean that guys of the new generation can say "I love you, mate..." and give each other a hug. For this to be acceptable among heterosexual men, however, requires a difficult and more deliberate delineation between acceptable masculine behaviour and that which would indicate 'substandard' or abnormal men. This insecurity and the desire to measure-up to some ideal is powerful in both heterosexual and 'failed heterosexual' groups, and both often have a gut-reaction and distaste toward the two dominant gay male stereotypes: the campy queen and the millennium male. Contrary to popular belief, most gay visibility, though significantly increased, has not served gay people well. Sitcoms like 'Will & Grace' have made it very difficult for 'real' gay men to be taken seriously, perpetuating the traditional role of gay men as minstrels/entertainers parodying bitchy divas and effeminate men, or else as style-conscious and overgroomed corporate clones driven by materialism and narcissistic individuality. 'Queer eye for the straight guy' is a reality TV comedy perpetuating this myth through the make-over of a heterosexual male slob by a team of sarcastic and over-dramatic gay 'stylists'. Ironic that modern society's perfect heterosexual male should have the style and capabilities of a gay construct; the ideal gay man..., except that he's not gay!

Homophobia

The re-imaging of the modern male (how many men in NZ own a black singlet and pair of gumboots) has been a task left to fashion and beauty/health marketing. The result has been advertising campaigns filled with homoerotic imagery hawking the Calvin Klein underwear, shampoos and moisturisers that were originally for 'queers', appearing in men's magazines and balanced with 'real blokes' to maintain some respectable masculinity. A case on point would be the recent first television advertisement for shampoo (Sunsilk Australia) targeted at men, set in the locker-room post match with all the expected male-on-male banter spent assuring fellow team mates that the shampoo (his masculinity?) is legitimate. Most behaviour is acceptable as long as the men interacting with you can safely presume you're batting on 'their team'. This self-reassurance of their stable (unstable?) masculinity occurs time and again through jokes, horse-play and displays of physical dominance. Why does masculinity need this protective self-affirmation? Perhaps male identity is formed in response to the play-ground put-downs; In anticipation of disapproval and public humility, we learn to become what men should be. We don't really know what that is, but at least we know it's not a 'faggot'.

Group Male Identity

The construction, development and maintenance of personal identity relies on the group identities available to us. Understandably the stability of our self-perception can come to depend on the identifiability of groups, from professional bodies, sporting enthusiasts, consumer groups and cultural communities, to gender and religion. While a practicing certificate or Crusaders cap guarantee certain memberships, the owner of male genitalia is expected to further prove eligibility to the masculine fraternity, an evolving and ambiguous group. One wonders at the identity crisis many men keep at bay through career and sport association alone.

The good faith of heretics

The fear and anxiety of many men are violently expressed when group identities come under threat. Rape crisis centers experience significant increases in calls after losing rugby matches, and verbal and physical assault on men exhibiting behaviour considered non-gender conforming occurs everyday in our schools and streets. The Church has also resorted to violence to clarify its self-identity. Simplistically, heresy arises from the struggle between majorities and minorities in the Church, where victorious majorities or large groups split off and classify the other as heretical.ⁱⁱ “One of the most terrible phenomena of Church history... and most incomprehensible disfigurement of the body of Christ [is] the Inquisition...[heretics] have never been understood by lukewarm believers, by shrewd ecclesiastical tacticians and by the diplomats of the Church, great and small, who are not born for martyrdom...The spectacle of...countless broken human lives can teach the Church humility and self-awareness.”ⁱⁱⁱ Learning from someone involves changing oneself to understand their conclusions and establish common ground.

Hans Kung, one of the greatest theologians of our time, argues for a positive attitude to heresy, to preserve the Church from rigid complacency and vain self-satisfaction. Heresy, overcome by the power of love, can be a moment of grace for the Church. He does warn of the dangers of true understanding since “heretics were often more intelligent and acute than their orthodox opponents”^{iv} and that the legitimate diversity of doctrine may increase in scope. The Church may need time to understand new interpretations, indeed the list is very long of points on which heretics have, much later, been seen to be right.^v If a heretic chooses to remain in the Christian community, then the commandment to love means the Church cannot break communion with him.

The book of Romans, it's first few chapters often used to ostracise homosexuality, is almost entirely about the solidarity and unmerited holiness of the People of God, the Israelites. Importantly for us, it is about our incorporation and grafting onto this group through a baptismal identity. A baptism as ‘unnatural’ as same-sex behaviour. Chapters two and three chip away at an inherent Jewish righteousness, and by chapter five it becomes clear that righteousness is extended through grace alone. The holiness of the Church, its being set apart and declared for God's purpose, is an action of God and not human exertion.^{vi} We cannot deserve salvation or membership in Christ's Body, this theological gift, or Grace, is free and unfair. In chapter eleven Paul becomes deliberately provocative using the same phrase that he used to describe the unnatural acts of the Gentiles, to describe the unnatural act of God in grafting them onto the covenant relationship with Israel. Gentile Christians are not God's ‘first love’ and of whom God is jealous. It is natural that God should love God's own children, but not natural to adopt the Gentiles, let alone show any solidarity with their nature, their excessive sexuality which in Paul's unsavoury rhetoric distinguishes them (most of us) from the Jews.^{vii} As unnatural, unfair and undeserved God's love is for us, it is our only hope. And yet for centuries the Church has worried over its membership status, doubting the Divine promise that baptism signifies.^{viii}

Paul's baptismal formula overturns the apparently natural distinctions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female through grafting the Gentiles onto the vine of Israel. Galatians 3:28 issues a warning to those that would let social or natural distinctions turn into moral ones that blind them to

the 'excessive' and 'unnatural' grace of the Holy Spirit, thereby risking their own means of adoption into the Body of Christ. Of course baptism doesn't alter the fact that we still have identities according to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, cultural heritage, and socio-economic position. But our primary identification ought to be Christian; nothing takes precedence over our baptism and membership in Christ's Body. Our distinctions, particularities and differences don't vanish within the Church, they create drama and conflict. We are called to clumsily hold onto each other through the here-but-not-yet tension, to seek understanding, love and holiness moment by moment. Our human desire for security and self-preservation will split the Church if we don't make room to experience the messy workings of the Spirit or allow time and space to differ.

Modern Marriage

Conservative Christians fear that gay people and all they stand for are undermining marriage and the nuclear family. Living a gay identity does mean finding oneself inherently opposed to the idolatry of the nuclear family, questioning the pathological motives of marriage and child-bearing: financial security, emotional dependency, fear of dreaded singleness, the hope of pseudo-immortality through procreation, fulfilling the expectations of family and friends, a desire for picture perfect families enjoying 'Farmbake' beside the SUV, and every other desire that the marketing media have planted in our society. Never underestimate the personal grieving that gay men experience in turning their back on the trappings of the twenty first century consumer household, the lost hope of traditional fatherhood, and the comfortably respectable identity of 'family man'. We will never be husbands or fathers, traditionally speaking, and that is an anguished realisation.

This cynicism has deconstructed the sentimentality of Christian sexuality, a task long overdue by the Church. Even conservative writers argue that the Church's sexual norm has always been whatever the ruling elite says it is, meekly blessing it, whether the elite be aristocratic or progressively liberal.^{ix} Marriage, during the New Testament, was typically the celebration of a secular contract involving property,^x the Fourth Lateran Council declared it a sacrament, and marriage ceremonies only becoming a legal requirement in England in 1754. Virginal brides and elaborate white wedding ceremonies were never an ideal or reality till the late eighteenth century. And even then at least half the brides in Britain and the USA were pregnant at their weddings having entered into committed relationships through betrothal.^{xi} At the dawn of the Industrial revolution working classes continued informal engagements, but the propertied classes created social structures designed to monitor the distribution of wealth, and so dance rooms and balls, ostentatiously and reassuringly expensive white weddings, and honeymoons were introduced and established as the norm.^{xii} The rise of individualism in social and economic life created the ideal of companionate marriage and the nuclear family, while welfare legislation between 1850-1960 created the era of early mandatory marriage, with breadwinning husband and dependent wife. Since the understandable reactions of the 1960's sexual revolution, the theology of marriage has become less concerned with the raising of children and more with the nourishment of a private sexual union.

This focus of the Protestant churches has aided and paralled the contemporary secular ideal of companionship and sexual security. While it can be argued that Catholic theology, instead, has focused too much on the biological physicality of marriage, sex and procreation, divorced from intention.^{xiii} Anglican Africans baptise and confirm (but don't ordain) polygamists while the Roman Catholic Church allows 'celibate' priests in Africa to keep a concubine.^{xiv} The confusing theological understandings of divorce, annulment, remarriage, contraception, and married heterosexual activity as well as pre-marital relations are either vague or contradictory. This growing incoherence began long before the rise of the Gay Debate. The fear, uncertainty and frustration of Church-goers have been misdirected into official pronouncing that does nothing but ease the discomfort of parishioners and fool them into believing the problem is not theirs, the gays have been dealt with and dismissed. The Church's preoccupation with self-preservation and being a moral guardian is shameful.

Our whole society, through its law, social norms and religious institutions presumes to declare (for who's benefit?) what our families, bodies, sexualities and lives mean. And still the definition of 'biblical family' or 'society's smallest unit' owes more to Modernity, Capitalism, and 1950's psychology than Scripture. Biblical families, especially Jesus and his ancestry, are rank with adultery, sexual excess, surrogacy, concubinage, rape, murder, seduction, illegitimacy, single parenthood, child abuse, and prostitution. From Abraham and Sarah to a single Nazarene from an unwed pregnancy with two 'fathers', and who should have been married with four kids by age thirty but partied with prostitutes and scoffed "Who is my mother?"^{xv}, the biblical couple with 2.5 kids is nowhere to be found. Modern, and biblical, marriage was messed up without gay help, yet gay Christians still hope to join this battered tradition. Not to mock it through pretend weddings, and neither to gain respect through simulating heterosexual marriage. They want tabs and slots to mean something.

The argument really does have to begin with bodies and particularly genitals. Much of the gay debate has tried to answer what can be changed and what can't, what does biology dictate and society construct. In anatomy classes I learned how the function we put our bones to shapes their form, and that their form dictates their function. No matter how far back you trace, even through embryonic development, form and function shape each other inseparably. Neither the influence of body on environment or vice versa come first. Human development, physically and mentally, is this interactive dynamic. The body doesn't statically wait for function and meaning to be stamped onto it by the environment and society. In fact, the body's meaning is fluid. I have learnt that nobody walks perfectly and that no human body is symmetrical, and that the line between mental illness or disability and not is flexible and arbitrary. The function, role and meaning of our bodies are not dictated by biology. Biology and socio-historical factors are interdependent especially when most significant. The way I interpret the body of a person with poor eyesight or a disability, or the bodies of everybody else depends on what 'language' I'm using.

Unsettling since this means that biology, nature, and matter are not universal, stable and discrete. How correct because the worldview of nature composed of self-grounding, self-defining objects independent of God is idolatry. Human beings are dependent upon God for their existence, although the nature of this existence cannot be read off from our existential condition. There is no ghost in the machine, our very corporeality is spiritual by nature and to be understood as such must be understood theologically, not on its own secular terms. The world cannot explain itself without looking to its context, and as a created existence we look to God.

Our understanding is constructed by analogy. Which way the analogy runs can be difficult to detect sometimes. Humans have often projected analogy onto God, making God in our image. Particularly our nature as sex differentiated creatures onto a God who is not. Try reversing Ephesians 5:21-27

"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Husbands, be subject to your wives, as to Christ. For the wife is the head of the husband as Christ is the head of the church, her body, and is herself its saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let husbands also be subject in everything to their wives. Wives, love your husbands, as Christ loved the church and gave herself up for him, that she might sanctify him having cleansed him by the washing of water with the word, that she might present the church to herself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle..."

Does this exercise require us to imagine a different theology, different kinds of relationship between the Trinity (Mother, Daughter and Holy Spirit) and the Daughter and her Church? If yes, then we are thinking the Trinity a parody of creation. Changing the order of the sexes should not alter God, yet we are guilty of a relative priority of one sex to the other. The Fatherhood of God is not male, and so priests need not be male, just as the fact that we are all the Bride of Christ does not disqualify men from salvation. Our language of theology is an analogy by necessity and doesn't require us to physically instantiate a set of historical realities to be in God's image.

The existence of male and female bodies has created the idea of gender complementarity. This idea, unlike any faith based understanding of sexuality, does not derive from the 'difference' or 'otherness' between the Persons of the Trinity. It is infected with a patriarchal perspective where women do not stand *with* men, or *before* them as other, but stand *for* men. No biblical couple demonstrates how gender complementarity is meant to reflect the divine image. The moment Adam and Eve interact they sin. The writer of Genesis creates ironic literary couplings: The one shared flesh becomes that of the shared fruit, the helpmeet becomes an accomplice, and innocence becomes ignorance and naivety. It must be remembered while reading Genesis that the point is an ironic display of the state *after* the Fall and not before. Does it take a man-woman pair to exhibit the fullness of the divine image? If so then the unmarried Jesus provided a deficient reflection of the image he came to renew. Male and female, God may have created us, but theologically those differences are erased otherwise only couples can reflect God.

The heterosexual pairing, often described as an I-Thou relationship, is unlike Trinitarian relatedness. The social character of God's relationship with Israel and the Church is more I-We. Jesus worked primarily with groups, crowds, children, disciples, friends, and for the wider benefit of observing groups. I-Thou relationships dismiss third parties and crowd out the community and the Holy Spirit, turning co-humanity into co-individuality. Christ promises to be with us not each individually that we might encounter God as I and Thou, but where two or three are gathered in God's name. It is the community gathered by the Holy Spirit which is that of the Trinity projected onto creation. A community that is bride (as Beloved of Christ), groom (as Body of Christ) and wedding guests as witnesses and celebrants. Love desires a witness and in the life of the Trinity gratitude, grace and love subsist in a thoroughly communitarian way. This is how we can say 'God is Love'. The Father lives from giving, the Son from gratitude, and the Spirit from delight. The human body is thus given far more meaning than a single person, couple, or set of genitals can sustain.

Besides the meaning of male and female bodies challenging the acceptance of same-sex marriages, there is the meaning of sexual attraction and desire. A reasoned theology of erotic passion and bodily intimacy is desperately needed by the church. The greatest gap in the Christian tradition is the failure to say anything much as to how the taking up of sexual passion into authentic desire happens.

Archbishop Rowan Williams, in his paper 'The Body's Grace', puts it so,

"Nothing will stop sex being tragic and comic. It is above all the area of our lives where we can be rejected in our bodily entirety, where we can venture into the 'exposed spontaneity' that Nagel talks about and find ourselves looking foolish or even repellent, so that the perception of ourselves we are offered is negating and damaging, homosexuals, I think, know rather a lot about this, ... grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted... the Christian community (has) the task of teaching us so to order our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired."

Every creature wants to be significant, wanted, and this desire has human bodily concomitants. Unfortunately *eros* has been incorrectly characterised as antithetical to *agape*, as a possessive demanding desire taking satisfaction opposed to selfless giving where the concern for 'other' is primary. They are simply not so. *Agape* and *eros* are two perspectives within the same dynamic, moments of giving where giving is also receiving. There can be no selfless dispossession, or kenotic love which is not also erotic - endless giving with no receiving is nihilistic and indifferent. It is no part of divinity to need and yearn, but God chooses and takes on need as part of God's humanity, God's body which is Jesus.

There can be no desire where there is no difference. Sadly many traditional marriages do not maintain a true equal otherness due to a relative hierarchy of the sexes from the perspective of the male sex. There is no true partnership, but a narcissistic co-operation, where the woman has function only within the economy of male desire where she functions as complement, not difference. The woman passively creates a space to support active male productivity. The erotic becomes an economy to restore mutual lack, a self-fulfilling erotic economy with no room for free self-giving, and therefore outside the scope

of redemption. The narrative performance of a life-long Christian marriage holds difference in tension without fusion into indifference and nihilism. If 'male' and 'female' bodies are unstable, and if 'otherness' is to be maintained within 'becoming one' then that difference must be far more than sexual. If the primary biblical bodily distinction of circumcision is overcome, then male/female, gay/straight is nothing. Same-sex relationships are not narcissistic, introverted or self-indulgent, but fascinate us with an attraction that is about more than genitals, respecting the interval that separates, however indefinable it may be.

If we were created to enjoy God, then the joy of sex, under sanctifying circumstances, is appropriate. Sexual attraction has to be about bodies and God's self-gift in Christ gives our bodies meaning beyond utility, declaring physical beauty or pleasure for its own/our's/God's sake.

"Same-sex love annoyingly poses the question of what the meaning of desire is - in itself, not considered as instrumental to some other process, such as the peopling of the world. We are brought up against the possibility not only of pain and humiliation without clear payoff, but, just as worryingly, of nonfunctional joy - of joy, to put it less starkly, whose material 'production' is an embodied person aware of grace." p66 Williams

God's desire for us is bodily. The body of Jesus of Nazareth was where God chose to become vulnerable to human touch, taste and hurt, and to the experience of the Father's causeless delight and self-emptying love or kenosis. The crucifixion breaks open the Trinity to allow Christ's Body in. And the sharing of the communion bread reminds us of our incorporation as physical bodies, as Church, as embodied co-humanity into the inner life of the Trinity. Eugene Roger's concluded,

"Eros ought to be a remainder concept left over from the eucharist; sex, like the eucharist, is a participation, analogous and derivative, in thanksgiving of our involvement in the lives of others." p242 Rogers

The doctrine of justification is the acceptance of creation as wanted, as desired by God unconditionally. No "If...then I'll love you" but a promise "Because I love you therefore..."

"To be formed in our humanity by the loving delight of another is an experience whose contours we can identify most clearly and hopefully if we have also learned or are learning about being the object of the causeless, loving delight of God, being the object of God's love for God through incorporation into the community of God's Spirit and the taking-on of the identity of God's Child." Williams p 65

Desire is to be controlled and redeemed not killed. The death of self, Christ requests, is the death of egoism through transparency and openness to others, not the suppression of desire. Eros moves from God down to us, so that because we read the stories of God's yearning and constancy, fidelity and promise, we learn for the first time what eros is for and what it means. So we experience sharp pangs of attraction to the bodies of others and yet desire should not have its goal in self-satisfaction, but in orientation toward gifting and yielding within co-humanity. The power of sexual attraction reflects the inescapability of the image of God embodied in our neighbours, of God's desire for us in corporeality. This initial movement of desire in us, when guided, issues in promise, holiness, and life with God. How can you tell gay Christians to reject the very reflex in them of the desiring God, that their very spring of love for neighbour must be denied and is sinful? That the attraction that draws them to an 'other' and invites them to reflect the loving desire and promises of God in a committed and holy relationship with each other and a community is sinfully ordered toward sin/separation/alienation between people and between God and humanity...? Unlike the renunciation of addictive behaviour that allows recovery and the realisation of full potential, the renunciation of homosexual desire, emotional and sexual union brings sacrifice and pain not guided toward holiness, but a loveless destiny, nothing, a negation of human fulfillment.

Marriage is the visibility, the publicness of bodies that mean, not for themselves alone, but for the Church, and what that visibility is of, is the glory of God. Christ enacted the love of the whole Trinity,

temporally (in time), for the human being. Christ also embodied the marriage of God and humanity showing us what eros is for and what it means, showing God's desire and faithfulness. Embodiment and performance require space and time. Marriage allows us to imitate God in promising and gifting time and space to a loved one. A stable commitment aided by its public and institutional support allows the couple to grant each other time and permanency, without which self-actualisation is impossible. It is particularly in this promise that God wills to be glorified (made manifest/visible) in marriage. Marriage leaves room for fading sexual urgency and its being taken up into other forms of care for partner and community. When strengthened and encouraged in marriage witnessed by the eucharistic community, eros/bodily desire returns home, performing its redeemed task of pointing to the Trinitarian community through fruits of the Spirit such as charity and hospitality that satisfy only so far as they set apart and orient us toward God. Sexuality transcends itself toward the spiritual integrity of the one being,

*"If sex is for **God**, then the task of celibacy is to bear witness to that fact **immediately**, whereas the task of people in sanctifying sexual relationships of whatever orientation is to bear witness to that through the faithful mediation of a human partner."*p247 Rogers

The celibate life is a choice to try finding one's bodily self through dependence and trust in the abundant delight of God. The married life is the choice to learn about the delight of God through intimate interdependence and profound trust of another person. It needs to be pointed out again that just because a body is pleasing to me I become vulnerable, God made human bodies vulnerable in each other's presence. The embodiment of God's creation will not leave me alone and neither monogamy nor celibacy cause these interventions of God through bodily forms of the neighbour to go away. Whether in marriage or celibacy, our sexual desires cannot be rejected and cut off from the body that God desires, loves and sanctifies.

Still many cannot hear 'erotic desire' without thinking 'self-centred lust', or worry that accepting our sexual attractions and bodily desires as occasions for Grace involves accepting every desire involving our genitals no matter how depraved. The unconditionality of erotic love becomes compromised by sin and human weakness, becoming a false alternative to God. A clear distinction must be maintained between sexual attraction, which seeks human intimacy and warmth among other things, and rape, for instance, where violence and domineering power create an arousal that demands satisfaction. Sexual perversions turn desire away from holiness by allowing love no time or freedom or reciprocity for one to be transformed by the perceptions of another. Freedom is lacking in sexual encounters bound to specific methods of sexual arousal such as sado-masochism (torture and tease) or 'bondage and discipline' (being bound and controlled) or role-playing or object fetishes such as leather and men in uniform. Reciprocity is lacking in rape, pedophilia and bestiality, and time is lacking in promiscuity and adultery. Open communication in the bedroom has certainly enhanced love-making for many married couples, but the increasing excursions of heterosexual society into vulgarity have destroyed the dignity of bodies. People treat each other as It rather than Thou. The Church discerns between conduct that treats humans as utility or dignified humanity. The poorly explained categorising of all same-sex activity as selfishly instrumental and perverse makes it difficult to minister to a group who's high incidence of promiscuity and fetish (soon to be matched by heterosexual practices), and not their sexual orientation, have destroyed meaningful sexual intimacy.

Christianity is fast becoming a minority religion, and as such these opinion are that of a conservative gay Christian minority. The reasons that secular gay men want legislated marriage may be as inward-looking, anxious, and unchristian as those of heterosexual society, secular and 'Christian'. But the persistence of gay Christians within the Church reveals a profound respect for the institutional stability of Marriage. Marriage is not for the glory of human romance or the declaration of same-sex relationships as just as loving as straight ones. Gay couples do not need marriage to make their relationships more loving, this misses the point of marriage (reflecting God's promise to us and desire for us) and dismissing the role of society and community in supporting and celebrating every wedded couple. The community, God's Spirit, is never passive. Besides the vows exchanged between a couple at their wedding, the congregation vows to support the couple. Is there any successful marriage that

has not relied on the support and accountability to friends and family. It is a very serious charge. Third parties at a wedding guarantee, affirm, acknowledge, witness and delight in the love of two.

“When Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a wedding feast, and theologians say that the role of the Third Person of the Trinity is to guarantee, celebrate, bless and delight in the love of the Father and the Son, they are speaking of the same reality” Rogers p 245

The Trinity is reflected in community, the co-humanity of people in relationship, whether this be the dynamic of a couple in a community or of single persons in fellowship. Humans are beings in encounter, so ‘single’ is a misleading term for unmarried persons. Abundant living does not require sexual partnerships.

Abundant living also does not require raising a family. The equal and total self-giving within the Trinity is NOT reflected in the human family. Children and parents are not equals and are not called to relate in partnership and promise like couples do. The gender bending ambiguity of Trinitarian symbolics in unstable pronouns and flexible analogy throughout the scripture resists sharp definitions of gender and denies the image of the fertile union of a private two.

There is no procreative principle enshrined in the Trinity, both Augustine and Richard St Victor rejected the divine image ‘father-mother-child’. Jesus and Paul both speak of marriage without mentioning children. Do postmenopausal or infertile couples reflect the Trinity. Erotic desire or our bodily yearning toward a God-determined End and our participation in the Trinity’s gift and gratitude that excite and satisfy it do not need an ending in children. We do not procreate as God creates to reflect the Trinity. God does not *need* creation to be the Trinity. Procreation exists to promote the species not a couple. The reality of many marriages that cannot have children declares sexual union to be about more than procreation.

Infertile and same-sex couples have realised that Christians best imitate God’s relation to them as children not when they bear and beget them, but when they *adopt* them. We are the wild branches grafted onto the domestic olive tree (Israel). We are God’s children through the grace of adoption/baptism. The obsessive sense of entitlement that many couples and even single women have over child-bearing is idolatry. The adoption of children into gay and infertile homes exemplifies the hospitality of Christian agape, and reminds us of God’s adoptive love for us.

The question whether same-sex couples should be able to adopt and raise children is often most concerned with the risk of turning impressionable children gay. The parenting skills of same-sex couples have been placed under a scrutiny and level of expectation that few families could bear, and through personal experience have fared better than most. Raising a family environment full of love, open communication, well articulated expression, care and encouragement. It is amazing what interpersonal skill the well-adjusted gay person develops through years of reflection, observation, and self-acceptance. Yet some would still protest that children require a parent of the same-sex to role-model appropriate gender behaviour. Does the division of domestic chores along gender lines teach a child to be more feminine or masculine? Should a daughter learn sports and skills that her brother should not. What parental mistakes produce a gay son? What childhood incident could have made him more masculine? Should he have drunk more beer or watched more sport?

Recognising same-sex marriage

Gay and lesbian relationships must be allowed to exhibit the spiritual fruits of faith, hope and charity in sacramental form; must be allowed a ‘marriage rule’ to give their holiness ecclesial shape. A wait perhaps similar to that before the integration of heterosexual marriage forms into the church. Church and Marriage do not justify same-sex love: they are its grace. Communal acceptance is a grace heaped on top of the grace of finding yourself undeservedly and unconditionally loved and bodily desired by someone for whom you profess the same.

Self-hatred, unstable self-esteem and pathological co-dependency are understandable consequences of external harassment, the threat of assault and internalised homophobia and left unresolved they sabotage the relationships of many gay men and women. Coming out and its accompanying sense of self-realisation and freedom of personal expression provide a catalyst for restoring right-relation with our loved ones. An opportunity that requires immense effort covering a lifetime. The Church needs to welcome same-sex relationships into the institution of marriage, to strengthen and reform the script that allows the community of God to reflect the Trinity's desire and love for us and Promise to us. Failure to stand up for all the silenced and oppressed is not simply neutral, but leaves one in collusion with violence - the violence of cultural belonging - of seeking approval at all costs. Gay marriages within the Christian community will deepen our appreciation of the marriage narrative. And gay Christians will show us the grace of forgiveness and the joy of letting resentment go. They will show us how to mean far more than what science says we should mean. It takes courage and trust in God to dissolve constructions of sexual identity, of every identity in fact, and replace them with our primary identity as adopted Children of God.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid p 249

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^{ix} Pierre W Whalon, “Toward an adequate moral evaluation of homosexuality *Anglican Theological Review* Fall 1997 79:4 p526-562

^x L. William Countryman, “*New Testament Sexual Ethics and Today’s World*”

^{xi} Evans, Mary “Love: An Unromantic Discussion” 2003 Blackwell

^{xii} Ibid

^{xiii} Above n 19

^{xiv} Ibid

^{xv} Matthew 12:48