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Should the Church Bless Same Sex Unions?
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Introduction

For most of this year a debate has been conducted in this church on issues of human sexuality, in response to a call by the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health of the General Convention.

In January the Task Force on Changing Patterns of Sexuality and Family Life of the Diocese of Newark submitted its report to the convention of that Diocese. That report has since served as the center piece of that debate. Briefly, it suggests changes in the church's position on sexuality in three specific areas: 1. Couples living together prior to marriage, 2. Gay couples in committed relationships, and 3. Sexual relations among widowed, divorced, or mature single adults.

I wish to focus on the second of these areas, gay couples in committed relationships. The question is, "Should the church bless same sex unions?" My answer is, yes.

In researching this matter, it was surprising to learn that the Dioceses of California, Michigan and Rochester were working on this matter and that in one of these dioceses, Rochester, same sex unions have been blessed for 14 years.

What I have to say is by way of a draft. Any thoughts that you may have to help clarify this issue will be gratefully received.

Should the Church Bless Same Sex Unions?

1. Sex

In C. S. Lewis' book, "Mere Christianity," he wrote, "You can get a large audience together for a strip tease – that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theater by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let the audience see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon. Would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?"

Lewis goes on to argue that sex is good in itself, but that it has become "disordered" and so needs to be controlled. All drives need some guidance channels. What his illustration could as easily prove is not that sex is disordered, but that it is different from the appetite for food. His position seems to require what he doesn't show, i.e. that there was a time when you couldn't get an audience together for a strip tease.

In reality, however, Christians have historically failed to make the distinction Lewis makes between the drive and its current state. The "disorder" has been seen as natural to the drive itself and sex has been viewed with suspicion and alarm. The response has been to give it as little room for damage as possible. Like most strong forces, however, suppressed in one place, it surfaced in another.

We have generally managed this suppression in one of two ways. We have denigrated sex, i.e. made celibacy the superior value and permitted sex merely for procreation. Or we have hallowed it. So divine instrumentality have we made it that it can only be enjoyed within the bonds of matrimony, where it is a high and holy calling. Debasement and elevation have the same, only thinly veiled purpose, to constrain this hateful drive. Hateful, because Western humanity has a need for control and sex is powerful, a challenge to that control and therefore evil.

Apollonian society has no use for the Dionysian. It reminds us of our earth-bound roots.

Humanity has two problems. One is sin from which we have been saved. The other finitude from which we will not be saved because it is a gift of God. Our sin derives in large measure from our willful refusal to accept our finitude. Sex is one of those forces that reminds us, who would be gods, of our earth bound and dependent state. It is therefore an enemy.

Christian tradition in the West has decreed only two forms of sex, lust and conjugal affection. Lust is suppressed as evil and conjugal affection alone allowed or deified for the continuance of the race.

The so-called sexual revolution of the 60's and 70's escaped the bonds of this polarity only apparently. It denied the lust vs conjugal affection position, but subscribed to the deification of sex. So

anybody who wanted in moderation or not at all was ridiculed just as those prepared to allow it only in marriage had been. One rigidity replaced another and people worried that they were not getting enough.

Robert Frost has a poem called "Half a Revolution." Essentially, he says, the problem with revolutions is that, while the names change, the relative positions don't. What we've never had in the sexual realm is "half a revolution." Sex is neither so holy, nor so dreadful as we would have it, but reaching that balance is difficult.

There are many reasons for that, most of which I am not competent to explore, but to follow sex researchers John Gagnon and William Simon for a moment, "Sex is by its very nature a dependent variable. It is something that is more caused than causing and only through its ties with other human experience is it given meaning." That is neither to praise it or blame it, but to begin to see it as a reality among realities useful or used for ill, depending upon its use – a gift from God.

This debate is about changing sex standards – something at least in one instance I have said I am for. "But to change standards doesn't mean there should be no standards. Standards and guides provide a framework for meaningful life. They assist the formation of thoughts, feelings and actions. They provide for an orderly world and a sense of security." So the issue is change, not abandonment. The issue is clarity and balance in sexual matters.

Someone, putting down a British moral theologian, said, "He could make homosexuality boring." Quite an accomplishment since the very mention of the subject is apt to make hearts palpitate, or gorges rise. For if sex is bad or questionable in the Christian tradition, no form of sex has a worse press at least in the last few hundred years. For heterosexual sex, marriage existed – which was either the Pauline option to "burning with desire," or the imaging of the Trinity. But for homosexual sex, there was no Christian outlet. Actually, the outlet is not to be a Christian at all. For this state, change or celibacy is prescribed.

Homosexuality is still widely viewed as the most perverse of an already perverse drive, that threatens the order of society.

My point is that Christian society's antipathy to homosexuality is in part an antipathy to sex itself.

In order to deal with this phenomenon, we must turn to scripture, for, while I do not think scripture is really the origin of the church's antipathy, it is where it has gone for its arguments.

2. Scripture

How do we read scripture? One way to summarize the fundamental issue is to ask if scripture is to be read in terms of "plot line," or "proof text." Traditionally, Anglicanism has opted for the plot line approach, only departing from that position and turning fundamentalist when scriptural texts reinforce our predetermined prejudices. The report of the Diocese of Michigan on the subject of this paper puts it this way,

"The Anglican Church, understands the Bible to be the product of historically and culturally rooted human communities, and recognizes the need for, and the appropriateness of serious biblical study which seeks to discern the essential message through the culturally conditioned understandings in which it was embodied. That means that individual verses and passages must be weighed within the total context and evaluated in relation to the total logic and thrust of the biblical message. This approach is not a concession to modernity, but a profound affirmation of the doctrine of the Incarnation."

I would add that this approach is not a denial that scripture is the word of God, just that it is the words of God. Jesus' concern throughout the gospels is not with the letter, but its meaning. What does the law or custom indicate about the divine will? God in scripture has "not instructed us in spite of our humanity, cutting across insight and experience," says Norman Pittinger, "God works through love in our hearts, or the Holy Spirit in our minds as we think seriously and carefully and profoundly about such questions."

This raises some questions: Is revelation progressive? Do we learn more and more about the changeless God as we change and are able to receive it? Is what is permissible in one age, outgrown in another? What is forbidden, permissible? Is finality in the bible ahead, or behind? Human beings are both sinful and finite. They have and will distort the divine revelation by their fault and by their limitations, but sin's control may be eroded and finitude may still be enlarged and informed.

Pittinger again says he rejects the church's traditional response to homosexuality because we know more about the state than the biblical writers did. His assumption is that if they knew what we know they would reach similar conclusions.

This approach to scripture is not new; it is progressive. "Because of it, the church has come to the recognition that, in spite of what isolated passages may say to the contrary, the logic of the biblical message, 1. required the abolition of slavery and the denial that it was divinely ordained, 2. Led to the recognition that reverence for marriage required the acknowledgment of civil divorce so that it could be a servant of love and not a prison, 3. Resulted in the recognition of the full humanity of women and the basicness of that humanity which made them able to image Christ."

Here are two images of this approach to the understanding of

scripture:

One is the story of the Canaanite woman who enlarged Jesus' view of his mission. Jesus was truly incarnate as scripture is. He learned as he went along. His mission was, he thought, to Israel alone. but he could not deny the need and the faith of this woman of the enemy race. "Even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables." So God, speaking through her humanity, shattered a wall in the heart of his son and transformed the rejected to the included and gave him a new vision of his mission.

The other story takes the longer view. Scripture's form as well as its content conveys a message. It begins in a garden where innocence and ignorance reign. It ends in a city, the New Jerusalem rich and complex, to which the nations bring their experiences and accomplishments. The fall is, for orthodox Christianity, a fall upward. God is not content to restore, to roll back the clock – he goes forward capitalizing on the loss of innocence to make a new thing. So the Second Adam is far greater than the first.

Theological and moral life is not a matter of reading the fathers or the rule books as if it were all laid down and has only to be applied. It is a voyage of discovery, the revelation of the DNA. Finding out and actualizing potential. The direction is laid down. The details are to be invented. We are to follow Christ. We know the outcome because we know him. We do not know what the outcome will be. That we discover if we are faithful.

Historically, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, (Gen 19:4-11), is to homosexuals what the curse of Ham, (Gen 9:20-27), is to black slavery; the key biblical citation. During the Christian period of the Roman Empire the fathers appealed to it and the Emperors cited it in statutes against "sodomy," that is, the sin of Sodom, because they believed it linked homosexuality with the divine wrath. Evidence of homosexuality then, was believed to threaten the whole social fabric with divine judgment. Yet nowhere in the Old Testament is the sin of Sodom interpreted as homosexuality. While the text seems to imply that homosexual rape was what the men of Sodom had in mind, both in it and in its parallel in the book of Judges, (19:22-30), where heterosexual rape is committed, the occasion for condemnation appears to be the violation of the Near Eastern laws of hospitality.

When Jesus mentions Sodom he identifies its sin as inhospitality to strangers. For example; in Luke, Jesus says of those towns that were inhospitable to his disciples, "...I tell you on that day, Sodom will fare better than that town." (Lk 10:12). In the desert context of these passages, inhospitality to a stranger meant certain death.

John McNeil, the former Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, who has written widely in the field, notes the irony of making homosexuals the victims of inhospitable treatment on the basis of the misunderstanding of a story condemning inhospitality. It was not until Philo of Alexandria, in the first century of the Christian era, that the sin of Sodom was explicitly identified with homosexuality.

The prohibition of homosexual acts and the prescription of death for them in the Book of Leviticus only mentions the male and stands

without any rationale in the context of a series of cultic laws. Biblical scholars believe the prohibition rests on the association with male temple prostitution characteristic of the other peoples in the Near East from whom Israel was anxious to separate itself. Homosexuality was then associated with idolatry and, for that reason, condemned.

There appear to be at least two other reasons for Old Testament prohibitions of homosexual acts. First: Israel, a small nomadic tribe involved in the conquest of a numerous agrarian people, was concerned for the increase of its population and condemned anything, therefore, that wasted the male seed or that, in any way, frustrated procreation. So masturbation and coitus interruptus were also condemned. Secondly: It was a custom in the ancient world to perpetrate anal rape on the enemy as a sign of conquest. It reduced him to the contemptible status of a woman. "Nowhere in scripture is there a clear condemnation of a loving sexual relationship between two homosexual persons."

If the Sodom story is the key biblical citation for any understanding of the church's historic view of homosexuality, the first two chapters of Genesis are the key to its understanding of sexuality in general. In them, not only the differentiation of gender, but the importance of sexuality is affirmed. Sexuality is clearly designed for two purposes; the procreation of the species, (Gen 1:28b), "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it," and the nurturing and bonding of the human community. "Then the Lord God said it is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him." (Gen 2:24). While the passage is susceptible to that interpretation, the Christian tradition has never held that heterosexual union was mandated.

Certainly, the distinction which gender symbolizes has a wider ethical significance; namely that individuals differ and that difference on whatever level is a gift from God. It can also be argued that this story is about God's call to us out of isolation into community. In the light of the fact that celibacy in much of Christian history has not only been regarded as an alternative to heterosexual union, but as superior to it, though in a real sense it frustrates both purposes of sexuality and, in the light of the limitations of the biblical material, there would appear to be room for homosexual unions which have the potential for fulfilling at least one of the purposes of sexuality.

3. Sexual Unions

We have said something about sex and homosexuality, about Scripture and Scripture's comments on homosexuality. Now let us look at sexual unions.

Christian heterosexual marriage normally hearkens back to the second chapter of Genesis which we have already looked at for its theological justification. It is not unusual to observe in such a discussion that the Trinity, as a doctrine, implies the unity and society of God. Eternal being is itself not alone. The divine personae comprise, in some sense, a family. God is himself in Trinity. Humanity in fulfilling itself requires the other. God did not make individuals singly; he made community. In the case of marriage, he made community bound, symbolically and actually by [t]he instrumentality of sex. As a matter of fact the differences between the sexes are the things that unite them and that challenge them to come out of themselves to encounter the other. So marriage is about not being alone, but coming out of oneself so one can be truly who one is.

Marriage is, of course, also about procreation. People marry, not only to come together sexually or to procreate, but to provide a home in which children can be raised.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, historically marriage, in its sexual role, has been about hemming in the sex drive; about control. So in the exhortation to the service in the 1549 book, the second purpose after procreation is, "a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, that such persons as be married might live chastely in matrimony and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body."

That is, of course, an improvement on St. Jerome's view expressed in his comment that, "St. Peter has washed off the filth of marriage through the blood of martyrdom."

Now, this church holds that Marriage is intended for, "the mutual joy of husband and wife; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of The Lord." It is worth noting that procreation has moved from first to last in the order of purposes. The negative view of marriage and sex has disappeared from the service at least. I think, in fact, the negative view of sex can be seen still in the idealization of marriage.

Marriage, of course, is not an invention of the church, it is, as theologians say, of the order of creation. Christian marriage, Holy Matrimony, is undertaken in the belief that God wants the couple to marry and in the determination to offer their union to God for his blessing and service. Marriage is therefore a vocation. Such unions in Christian Theology are undertaken to be life long and monogamous, though the church has undertaken, following Paul, to acknowledge the dissolution of marriages under some circumstances.

The importance of this fact, of course, is that the church has seen itself in the past authorized to act even contrary to the express statement of Christ when pastoral sensitivity seemed to require it.

David Scott, in his response to the Newark statement on sexuality argues that heterosexual married love is inherently a fuller medium for sharing in and showing forth the God we know, "Because it is in principle open to self giving and life giving, (procreation), in the context of a life-long covenant." His point is that Trinitarian doctrine teaches God's self giving and self-communication.

Here he follows Emil Brunner who argued that husband, wife and child were human images of God and were intended to be. As an horatory image, that is fine. When Scott proceeds on this basis to assert that sexual expressions outside of heterosexual marriage which are closed to procreation have, in principle, no potential to share in or show forth the God we worship, he has literalized an image and made an idol of a useful metaphor. Worse, he has absolutized a norm and damned everything else in the field. By exaltation, he has hemmed in the dangerous force once again.

Certainly, 'mutual support and the building up of one another' actualize life though it is not so 'concrete' an image as children.

Heterosexual married love will continue to be the norm and ideal for sexual expression in the Christian church. The issue is whether or not a norm or ideal excludes the recognition of approaches to it. And, in this case, whether or not a norm or ideal excludes all other forms of sexual expression when it is basically irrelevant to a certain constituency.

The exalted discussion of married love generally ignores the single state of Jesus and Paul and the long tradition of celibacy in the church which argues that community does not have to be genital or procreative to image God. That tradition exposes the idol of heterosexual marriage, at least as Scott and others conceive it.

Now we come to the core of the matter. Psychologists speak of the establishment of sexual identity and of sexual orientation. The first refers to the individuals' gender identity. We may be born physiologically male or female, but we must psychologically agree with our equipment. We must accept ourselves as males or females and we have all read of people who regarded themselves as misplaced. Some brought their psyches into conformity with their bodies. Some have had sexual operations. Some suffer it. Gender identity is usually established during the first two or three years of life.

Sexual orientation refers to the gender your sex drive identifies as a sexual partner. It takes longer to establish the orientation, though once established, it is difficult or impossible, to change. Depending on who you believe and how you count, some 5% to 10% of the American population find themselves, male or female, oriented erotically, toward persons of the same sex. I say they find themselves oriented, because they do not choose this orientation any more than the great majority of Americans choose their heterosexual orientation. Both groups receive their orientation as a given. While psychologists speculate, no one knows why some people are homosexual in orientation any more than they know why the rest are heterosexual. What does appear clear is that there are many, rather than a single reason.

The point is that millions of homosexually oriented persons exist;

in the U.S., between 10 and 20 million. If you take the larger number, they are almost as large a group as blacks. If you opt for the smaller figure, they are more numerous than Jews. It is likely that you will know a number of homosexuals.

Like many other human phenomena, sexual orientation exists on a continuum. So there are homosexuals who would be horrified at sex with the opposite gender, and homosexuals who "swing both ways" and all degrees in between. The truth, of course, is that heterosexuals also exist in this continuum. Kinsey's 1948 study has yet to be displaced and he found that a third of the population had had at least one homosexual experience to orgasm which may, in itself, account for the continuance of homophobia in our society.

The incidence of homosexual orientation in society may vary, but if you assume that something like 5% to 10% of the world population would describe itself as gay – that is 5%-10% of 5 billion, that is a large number of people to ignore, or condemn without vocation to celibacy.

In the past the church has insisted that this orientation was chosen, or that chosen or not, it could be cured. The Roman Catholic Church seems to oscillated between these two views. That this orientation is chosen, is contrary to the testimony of homosexual people, most of whom have no recollection of being other than they are and many of whom would gladly be otherwise considering the disabilities they suffer.

As for cure, because there is a continuum, one would expect the possibility of some reorientation at the extremes. That appears to be minimal. Once the orientation has been established, there is no healthy way to alter it. The techniques touted usually involve the internalization of self hatred, yielding psychological harm and suffering.

The cure of choice for some, of course, has always been heterosexual marriage in which the homosexual individual hoped by exposure to become weaned from his or her proclivities. The results, for the most part have been self hatred, bitterness, frustration and misery. The lives of countless people have been made wretched or ruined as a result.

The real choice for those with this orientation is not between heterosexual and homosexual relations, but between homosexual relations or none at all.

Cure or celibacy have been the alternatives provided by the moralists. We have spoken of the former. Now let us examine celibacy.

Celibacy has generally been regarded in the Christian tradition as a vocation undertaken usually for service, so religious, called to such a life have been called to celibacy as well. The Roman church has, of course, legislated celibacy for all called to the priestly ministry and that seems not to be working very well at the moment.

Celibacy is a gift, not a state people may be banished to because the[y] have an unacceptable sexual orientation. There has to be a strong

positive commitment to choose it. In its absence it will embitter if it is adhered to and in many cases it can be shown that persons who attempted it ended up acting out their sexual needs in compulsively promiscuous and self destructive ways.

Sex is a strong force. Denied appropriate outlets, it will find inappropriate expressions. To require a homosexual to be celibate, says Norman Pittinger, "is to ask him or her to commit sexual suicide, or at least to act abnormally since to wish to show love sexually is as normal to homosexuals as to heterosexuals."

In 1976 this church, in General Convention Assembled, declared "that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the church."

The Diocese of Michigan statement can again be quoted with profit here. They say this acceptance translates into, "We welcome you because we are all sinners though really your sin consists in being who you are. Unlike us, you are automatically and generally sinful, but we still love you and accept you.

"It is OK for you to be, but not to do. You may even join us if you don't tell us too explicitly who you are; please sit in the back and don't run for office. Never embarrass us. Just present us with a fair imitation straight behavior." That is; don't "flaunt."

Many people can hear this with little distress because they have forgotten what no black over 40 has, which is the almost visceral revulsion many white people claimed to feel at close encounters with blacks. In much of this country people have suppressed the recollection that it was in the area of sexuality that the visceral response was strongest and most violent. The typical justification for lynching was the alleged sexual accosting of a white woman by a black male.

Similar visceral responses are claimed for contemplating homosexual relationships. The nature of the response has to do with the threat of difference linked to that most threatening of powers – sex.

The reality, I think, is that we cannot hate the sin and love the sinner when the "sin" is intrinsic to the sinner's nature. We have forgotten that blackness was regarded and American society as sin, as intrinsic degeneracy. That is what inferiority is about, not lower intelligence or economic distress but fundamentally, accursedness in which it was suspected that the bearer of such a badge must be culpable.

But a sin that is intrinsic is not a sin. Either God made a mistake in making gays, or being gay is not a mistake but a but a divinely determined given and for those with that gift, a good.

It is instructive that psychologists, for the most part, agree that gays, like blacks, can be emotionally stable beings only if they accept their identify, not as the best of a bad job, but as a positive good. That acceptance is fully possible only when the society that denied them, accepts them too.

The civil rights movement was not only about laws and customs, but about personhood. The gay movement is about personhood also.

If change is not an option for the great majority, if celibacy is absurd, it is meaningless to say God loves gays, or that the church can minister to them, when it is their sexual orientation that distinguishes them, without some sexual option; Some real acceptance as opposed to words. Homosexuality cannot really be addressed by the church until it is accepted as a given, real and irrevocable. Only when we are prepared to admit that God did not intend all human beings to be heterosexual can we escape from the assumption that homosexuality is a deviation from God's plan and a sin. All else is double talk.

Even if it should prove, as the psychiatrists argue, that homosexuality is a personality disorder, the failure to negotiate successfully a part of their psychosexual development, it is irrevocable for millions.

None of us perfectly complete that theoretical sequence. The American Psychiatric Association has removed homosexuality per se from its list of mental disorders. Studies have indicated that there are many homosexuals who, apart from their sexual orientation, are indistinguishable from what the therapists describe as the "healthy population." Finally, it has been determined that stable lasting homosexual unions are not only theoretically possible, but numerous and real.

Homosexuals, like heterosexuals are sexual creatures. It is among other things, the nature of humanity to love. Before the hetero-homosexual split it was said, "It is not good for man to be alone."

If we dispose of sin and sickness as impediments to acceptance and to sexual unions, what other objections remain?

4. Objections that Remain

In the debate currently being conducted in the church I have been able to identify three. One, we earlier touched upon. That is the assertion that lasting heterosexual love in marriage is the paradigm and norm for sexual fulfillment in the Christian Church. Ruth Barnhouse points out correctly that Eve was created to Adam's partner. She notes that heterosexual relationship is the metaphor used of God's relationship to Israel. The issue, she says, is completeness and that we can be complete only in encounter with the radically other – namely the opposite sex. Then she oddly asserts that this does not have to be genital and indeed that single people can achieve this completeness. How, she does not tell us, but we are left wondering what prevents gays from achieving if the single can.

David Scott makes the same sort of argument using the Trinity, as we have seen. Plato, in the Symposium, treated the completeness idea. Being more, or differently informed, his myth in which people started out with two faces, four arms and legs, etc., and are split by Zeus, has some people male and female, some all female, some male. Completeness in love, for Plato, meant finding our other half, or, as my parents used, "Your better half." While the bulk would be male/female combinations, some would be female/female and some male/male.

Scott and Barnhouse are good at analyzing the philosophical errors of others. Barnhouse talks about the dualism of body and spirit, but there is another dualism or dichotomy characteristic of Western mentality. It is the conviction that if one thing is right, all things must be wrong. Difference always raises the intrinsic question – which is better, which is worse, rather than the instrumental question – which is better or worse for what.

Heterosexual marriage is clearly better for heterosexuals and will remain the norm for heterosexuals, and so the basic norm for society which is primarily heterosexual. But why should that fact preclude homosexual unions from the church's blessing, when that is better for homosexuals. Homosexuality is a minority concern, for people for whom, in the providence of God, heterosexual union is not an option. Homosexual union is therefore intrinsically a limited option, but for homosexuals, the parallel to heterosexual marriage.

Why must heterosexual marriage, in order to be the prime norm and paradigm, also be the only game in town? How is it made greater by denying to those incapable by nature of finding fulfillment in it, the fulfillment God has made them able to find?

David Scott in, "A Christian Response to Human Sexuality," in passing argues a practical point. "Affirming and blessing homosexual and non marital heterosexual relations certainly opens people to the danger of diseases which now exist."

That opening has already occurred. The question in this instance is whether blessing homosexual unions, and the attendant acceptance of homosexual orientation and relationships might not convey a legitimacy and a stability to homosexual life that for many, at least, might slow or eliminate the frenetic search for identity which multiple relations

often reveal. Whether or not homosexuality itself is a disorder, the homosexual community suffers from some real disorder in this regard, at least some, if that all, of which stems from being shut out, denied, unvalued and so unregulated by the general morality. Marginalized, many in bitterness and frustration take the contempt of society as a license. I would assert that the continual devaluation or ignoring of homosexuality is what opens people to the dangers of disease, not the other way around.

Over one half of the heterosexual marriages contracted in the U.S. end in divorce or annulment. Considering the difficulty of establishing a lasting heterosexual relationship in this country with all the legal and societal supports to boot, it is remarkable that so many homosexuals try to establish continuing relationships when not only are there no supports for them, but quite the contrary, society is marshalled to make the occurrence difficult and the continuation close to impossible.

Homosexual couples complain that it is, in fact, simpler and until recently, safer, to be discretely promiscuous, than to establish a permanent relationship. We reward people who hide their orientation which is easier to do, free of attachments and we penalize the honest expression of homosexual orientation. So long as we do this, we do not control, or guide. The church abdicates. By proposing impossible standards, we bring standards into disrepute.

It is ironic that in a time when AIDS is running rampant especially in the homosexual community and churches are marshalling money, prayers and concern to minister to the stricken; when every health organization recommends the establishment of monogamous gay relations, the church continues to withhold its blessing for same sex unions. Have we that strong an interest in the maintaining of one unchallenged norm? Even for those for whom it is emotionally incomprehensible?

The third objection I have encountered is advanced again by David Scott. "If" he writes "the church blesses homosexual relations, it tells the larger society, in principle, we don't care about the continuance of the human story through procreation." The all or nothing mentality is at work here again. Either this is the overstatement of the century or he has slipped back into believing that homosexuals are recalcitrant heterosexuals unwilling to do their duty and further, that their dereliction is attractive enough so that it will catch on if it is not condemned. If it is the latter, he is not unique. Inherent in lots of anti-homosexual writing is the sometimes stated, more often than not, conviction that unless squelched and loaded with opprobrium, homosexuality will prove attractive to otherwise heterosexual people. Why such a conviction should exist is rather hard to understand. If homosexuality is dereliction of duty it is a grievous fault and in the AIDS crisis, "Grievously" has that community "answered it." If gays could switch, one hopes there will never be more motive nor a better time than now. That ought equally to discourage tempted heterosexuals from crossing the line.

In fact this "denial in principle of interest in the continuation of the human story," is, I think, another part of the all or nothing idea. Why don't maiden ladies or bachelor uncles count in the same

disavowal. Why don't celibate monks or Roman Catholic priests?

What Scott is saying is what the Michigan statement illustrated, that you can't accept someone part way. That you accept them and the reality they represent, or you don't. We are not talking about sin; we are talking about nature. Some men and women are attracted across gender lines, some are attracted within. That is the way we found it. So far as we can tell that is the way it has always been. That, in any case, is the way it is.

The gospel to the lost sheep of Israel proved big enough to embrace the gentile. Has the gospel grown sufficiently in 2000 years to expand beyond the heterosexual majority to embrace the homosexual too?

It seems to me that if the church blessed same sex unions it would at long last be doing what it says it wants to do but won't – acknowledging that gay people are God's children too, loved by him no less than those who can "continue the race." Far from disavowing its continuation, it would express the concern that that continuation be meaningful and fulfilling for all.

During the Anita Bryant campaign against homosexuals in the 70's the slogan was, "Save Our Children." At a gay pride parade it was reported that someone had made a sign that read "We ARE Your Children." That is the point.

By and large we, as a church, have rejected the criminalizing of homosexual acts, but we still condemn them as sin – acts stemming from their nature, no less than heterosexual acts stem from a heterosexual nature – or we ignore them. None of these options will do. Nothing less than bringing homosexuals as a group into the human family and welcoming them as full participants in the church family will do. Second class citizenship has never worked and never will.

At one point David Scott says, "The church can continue to commit itself to the norm and ideal without excluding and condemning those who choose not to acknowledge it as the ideal."

What can that statement mean to a homosexual? As an abstract norm and a clear biological necessity for the continuation of the human race it can be acknowledged as the norm for the sexual expression of the majority of humanity. But what of him or her? Norms are guides by which we live our lives. By insisting solely on this norm, it does most certainly exclude and condemn those who, by virtue of who they are, are precluded from gaining guidance from such a norm. It excludes them from humanity. It condemns them to normlessness and the disorder which those who are so concerned that there be norms, fear for their community.

This either/or dichotomy has profound implications. It implies that the rightful position of the heterosexual majority depends upon the victimization of the homosexual minority. Must we sacrifice the one that the other may live?

Suddenly, the high priest's advice faces us again. Is it really our conviction – in the human sphere, not the divine – that the few, though counted in the millions, should in some sense be content to die for the many?

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