

STUDENT ESSAY

## The Validity of the Catholic View of Marriage



Society has undergone drastic changes in the role of marriage and the family in the last fifty years. Where once marriage stood almost universally for exclusiveness, permanence and the raising of children, today that assumption is being

challenged and dismissed as no longer valid. It is a paradox that weddings are ever more grandiose celebrations yet marriage is under siege. Traditional marriage is in decline while there is an outcry to legalize same-sex marriage; those who disparage it for heterosexuals acclaim it as a great and necessary good for homosexuals. Our culture has fundamentally distorted under the impacts of contraception, no fault divorce, a “hook-up” mentality, and more recently same-sex marriages.

In this essay I intend to provide the background on how we arrived at this point by first discussing two secular views of marriage, the “Conjugal or Historical” and the “Revisionist.” Then I will present the Catholic view and how it greatly benefits both the individual and the community. I believe that as a society we have lost our appreciation for how valuable good marriages are. If we do not take immediate steps to reverse this decline in the appreciation of marriage our society stands in danger of losing a powerful cultural dynamic that has produced both stable relationships and the best environment for raising children.

### I. The Current Perception of Marriage

From once being the basic institution of society marriage and its understanding have undergone rapid changes since the 1960’s. Historically, for most Americans marriage was considered the ideal state of life and we looked forward to finding a spouse, getting married, and be fulfilled with a permanent

relationship that hopefully would give rise to a new family through the gift of children. Many in America no longer share this view and in fact a whole new concept of marriage has developed to include same-sex marriages. How did we get here? How has society reached the point where we would have to defend the traditional concept of marriage? Up until even a decade or two ago the very idea of same sex marriage would have been unthinkable for most of us. However, we are living in times where the traditional views of human sexuality, marriage and family are rapidly changing and the environment has become ripe for the legalization of same-sex marriage to become a reality and a right. As the foundations of marriage have eroded it has created an environment that allows ideas such as same-sex marriage to emerge. With the advent of same-sex marriages many are also becoming apprehensive that polygamy, incest and other once taboo relationships may also become acceptable lifestyle choices since many of the reasons for legitimizing same-sex marriage would also hold true for legitimizing these other relationships.

The last forty years have seen a massive change in the perception of marriage. Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher in *The Case for Marriage* inform us that American society has managed “to transform marriage, the most basic and universal of human institutions, into something controversial” (Waite 1). They add that this attack comes from many sides but the basic position is that “a lifetime vow of fidelity is unrealistic or oppressive, especially to women” (1). Many so-called marriage experts say that marriage hinders our development as men and women. “The highest forms of human needs, contended proponents of the new psychologies, were autonomy, independence, growth, and creativity, which marriage thwarted” (1). As the feminist movement grew so did the critique of marriage and some groups even denounced marriage “as slavery, legalized rape, and worst of all, tied up with a sense of dependency” (1). Marriage for many women has increasingly been “described as a trap, circumscribing women’s intellectual horizons and lowering her sense of self-esteem” (1).

This war on marriage has involved both a full-fledged assault on traditional cultural views, such as the move to legalize same sex marriages, and also a more subtle attack that questions the need to get married at all. It is an inner cultural battle over competing values: “between rights and needs, between individualism and community, between fear and hope, between freedom and love” (2). Our society has mixed feeling about marriage: “On the one hand, we cherish marriage as the repository of our deepest hopes and wishes to forge stable families, to find lasting love. On the other hand, we fear being “tied down” or “trapped” and jealously guard our right to redefine ourselves and our lives, with or without our partner’s consent” (2). This ambivalence is not unique

to marriage and pervades our society in many ways. Anything that is truly worth pursuing is going to require sacrifices which can seem to be costly. Rather than taking a longer term view many look to shortcuts or an easier way. People are making decisions primarily on their short term emotional needs rather than taking a longer and more thoughtful view as to what is actually best for both themselves and society in the long run.

Waite and Gallagher aptly sum up the present state of marriage in America as being on the verge of becoming a post-marriage culture. “A post-marriage culture is not one in which nobody ever makes it to the altar. Rather, it is a culture in which marriage is viewed as unnecessary, or strictly speaking, optional—a private taste rather than a matter of urgent shared concern” (3).

John M. Haas in his essay, “The Contemporary World” published in *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study* discusses the decline of marriage: “Other ages grappled with what it meant for marriage to be a sacrament, what actually brought it to being, consent or consummation, the relationship between the contract and the sacrament, who were the proper ministers of the sacrament, what were property rights within marriage, and so forth” (Haas 337). He says the contemporary world’s struggle is to “grapple with the most fundamental question of what marriage itself is” adding that today “there is a question as to whether we know what marriage actually is” (337).

## **II. Judicial and Legislative Changes Impacting Marriage**

The move to change the definition of marriage has not been a grassroots movement on the part of the citizenry. While a small minority of states have acted to recognize it most state legislatures have not made the effort to change marriage laws in order to legalize same-sex marriage. Rather most of the developments have come more often by judicial decree rather than legislative debate. Judicial activism rather than reasoned discussion by elected representatives has led to changes in the law, with the courts issuing decisions and declaring new rights that our founding fathers could hardly have envisioned. There is an attitude that judges know what is best and we stand in danger of losing our democracy.

The United States Supreme court has been the biggest agent for change in redefining human freedom. A disconnect between human sexuality and reproduction grew on account of the widespread acceptance and use of contraceptives and there arose a new call to redefine human freedom. Initially these ideas were among the cultural elite but through the media the ideas spread to a wider audience. The watershed case was *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), which involved a Connecticut law that prohibited the use of contraceptives. The

Supreme Court invalidated the law on the grounds that it violated the Constitutional “right to marital privacy.” This case and its newly declared right became the basis for many court decisions that have followed in its wake. *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, (1972) expanded *Griswold* to unmarried people and gave them the same right to possess contraception as married couples and, by implication, the right of unmarried couples to engage in potentially non-procreative sexual intercourse.

Next, the *Roe v. Wade* decision issued in 1973 expanded the autonomous definition of freedom implicit in the right to privacy to include the right for women to choose to have an abortion. *Roe* granted that women under the Due Process Clause had a “substantive due process” right to privacy which permitted her to terminate her pregnancy for any reason during the first trimester. Rather than being the death of a human child, abortion became a choice and the killing of innocent human life in the womb became a simple exercise of the women’s right to choose. Then *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) followed, which gave a radically new definition of autonomous liberty and freedom: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” While these decisions were primarily concerned with contraception and abortion the rights elaborated by the court have implications for other areas concerning human sexuality.

In June 2013 the Supreme Court issued two cases regarding same-sex marriage. The first is, *United States v. Windsor* (2013) which held that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was unconstitutional as it deprived same-sex married couples the same rights as heterosexual couples. The second case, *Hollingsworth v. Perry* said the backers of Proposition 8 (a referendum held in California that limited marriage to heterosexual couples) lacked standing to appeal a lower court case saying the Proposition was unconstitutional. The net effect of the decision was to allow same-sex marriages to be legal again in California.

In discussing *Roe v. Wade* Haas summarizes the Supreme Court’s general attitude toward marriage: “Increasingly, husband and wife are no longer seen as bound together for the benefit of society in the common enterprise of building a family with shared rights and obligations” (Haas 336). Marriage’s historical purpose has changed. “Marriage is seen more and more as a tenuous and temporary arrangement between two individuals largely for self-gratification, personal fulfillment, or economic gain” (336).

### III. “Sexual Left” and Gay-Activists Agendas

Dale O’Leary in *One Man, One Woman: A Catholics Guide to Defending Marriage* informs us that the modern movement to change the definition of

marriage did not happen overnight. "It is the result of decades of efforts by gay activists, who have established clearly delineated objectives, developed comprehensive strategies, and devoted considerable resources toward achieving their aims" (O'Leary 7). The 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City were the turning point for adopting an aggressive strategy to change the American perception of same-sex attraction (7-8). Americans in the late nineteen sixties were reevaluating their social thinking, "revolution was in the air. Traditional morality was under attack. Gay Power fit right in with the spirit of the age, and the Stonewall Riots became a rallying symbol of gay activism" (8).

Two men in Minnesota in 1970 became the first same-sex couple to apply for a marriage license and were refused (8). The National Coalition of Gay Organizations in 1972 held a convention and developed the first-ever Gay Rights Platform which included demands that homosexuality should be taught in schools as a valid, healthy preference and lifestyle as a viable alternative to heterosexuality; repeal of all laws prohibiting solicitation for private voluntary sexual liaisons including prostitution by both male and females; repeal of all laws governing the age of sexual consent; repeal of all laws that restrict either the sex or number of persons allowed to be married; and extension of legal benefits to all persons who cohabit regardless of sex or numbers (8).

While gay activists realized that they would not get such changes immediately they had clear ultimate objectives. They started by asking for small changes in public accommodation laws to avoid discrimination. With initial success, they continued to ask for more changes. They "insisted that the changes they were proposing were insignificant—small matters of simple justice whose effects on larger society would be negligible. Their critics warned that the ultimate goal was the redefinition of marriage, but these concerns were dismissed as hysterical bigotry" (9).

As they gained success gay activists pushed harder and resistance began to grow among the electorate and legislators. "Gay activists realized that achieving their goals through legislation would require a sea change in public opinion—and the tide was not running their way. So they borrowed the strategy of the abortion-rights movement and they turned to the courts" (9). The gay activists hoped to find a more sympathetic ear with the courts than they were encountering with the people and in turn their legislators. "Counting on activist judges who could be moved by appeals to "privacy" or "choice" to grant what legislatures, public opinion, law, precedent, and tradition denied, gay activists presented their demands as a plea for Constitutional rights—and if voters were too bigoted to recognize these "rights," the judges, who knew better, could overrule them"(9-10). In the process, "Gay activists succeeded in identifying their

struggles with the fight against racial and sexual discrimination, thus entering into a coalition of political allies and winning more public sympathy" (10).

As Americans, we pride freedom and no one wants to be accused of bigotry or infringing on anyone's legitimate civil rights. Gay activists have been successful in stating their case in civil rights terms and have caught the mass-media's attention that opposition to their position becomes tantamount to prejudice and bigotry. On the surface, the civil rights arguments seem to be very strong and our natural inclination is that we do not want to be either unfair or unjust to a whole class of people. The battle for African-American civil rights is still recent in the memory of many people who as a consequence want to avoid being considered bigots or hateful to a class of people. Most especially as Christians we do not want to be judgmental and while we may disapprove of a particular sin we always are willing to accept the sinner. Christianity recognizes the effects of original sin and that no one is without personal sins. The issue is also personalized as most of us count gay people among our family and friends and we wish them happy satisfied lives.

O'Leary says that the move to legalize same-sex marriage and change the "definition of marriage is part of the worldwide Culture War pitting social conservatives against the coalition of radical feminists, sexual liberationists, population-control zealots, abortion advocates, and gay-rights activists" which she names the "Sexual Left" (19). "Its members envision a society where everyone can engage in the free pursuit of sexual pleasure, without ever having to bear the burden of shame, heartbreak, unwanted children, or sexually transmitted diseases" (19). We are beginning to see where the "Sexual Left" is not content with their gains on promoting same-sex marriage and are now looking to expand the rights of individuals to practice other sexual relationships such as polygamy and adult incestuous relationships.

#### **IV. Contrasting Views of Secular Marriage**

The recent book, *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*, by Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George is an excellent discussion of contemporary marriage. For wider appeal they intentionally frame their arguments in wholly secular terms. In its opening paragraph they maintain that the same-sex marriage debate is not just about homosexuality but about marriage itself. "What we have come to call the gay marriage debate is not directly about homosexuality, but about marriage. It is not about whom to let marry, but what marriage is" (1). They make the case that the real problem with marriage is that as a culture we have lost our understanding of what marriage actually is long before the issue of the legalization of same-sex marriages arose. The culture of

“No Fault Divorces” and the acceptance of couples living together without marriage have led to a general deterioration of the understanding and importance of marriage. People have lost why marriage is valuable and what makes it a unique human experience. Lost in this understanding is the appreciation of what constitutes the best life, the nature of the person, and the concept of freedom.

In framing their argument Girgis, et al. present two views of marriage. The first is the conjugal view or the traditional way marriage has been viewed which has “long informed the law—along with literature, art, philosophy, religion, and social practice—of our civilization” (1). Marriage is viewed in a comprehensive way to envision a bodily, an emotional and spiritual bond. It is “effusive: flowing out into the wide sharing of family life and ahead to lifelong fidelity. In marriage, so understood, the world rests its hope and finds ultimate renewal” (1).

The second view is the new revisionist one offering “a vision of marriage as, in essence, a loving emotional bond, one distinguished by its intensity—a bond that needn’t point beyond its partners, in which fidelity is ultimately subject to one’s own desires. In marriage, so understood, partners seek emotional fulfillment, and remain as long as they find it” (1-2).

To illustrate the contrast between the two views the authors use the poem, “Epithalamion” by Edmund Spenser.<sup>1</sup> The poem views marriage conjugally consisting of a comprehensive union: “Joining spouses in body as well as mind, it is begun by consent and sealed by sexual intercourse” (3). Marriage is completed in the act which brings new life. Marriage is especially made for procreation and calls for “that broad sharing of domestic life uniquely fit for family life” (3). Marriage calls for an “all-encompassing commitment: permanent and exclusive” (3).

William May in *Marriage: The Rock on which the Family is Built* has a wonderful description of the commitment that is made by those who freely consent to give and receive each other in marriage. “Marriage comes into existence when a man and women, foreswearing all others, through an “act of irrevocable personal consent” freely give themselves to one another” (4). A choice is made and a new identity comes about. “This man becomes this women’s husband, and she becomes his wife, and together they become spouses” (5). Prior to this consent the man and women were two separate individuals but with marriage they became unique and irreplaceable to each

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<sup>1</sup> For the text see <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174458>. The title is also a term, derived from the Greek, for any poem written specifically for a bride in her nuptial chamber.

other. "The man and the woman are not, for each other, replaceable and substitutable individuals but are irreplaceable and non-substitutable persons" (5). This comprehensive union has a value in itself, "but its link to children's welfare makes marriage a public good that the state should recognize and support (Girgis 3).

The revisionist view is very different: "It sees marriage as the union of two people who commit to romantic partnership and domestic life: essentially an emotional union merely enhanced by whatever sexual activity the partners find agreeable" (4). As long as the emotion lasts the relationship retains its value. "The state recognizes them because it has an interest in their stability, and in the needs of spouses and any children they choose to rear" (4).

Girgis, et al. give an example of a heterosexual relationship that fits the revisionist view to illustrate that 'there is nothing specifically homosexual about the revisionist view of marriage' (4). They show how these types of relationships are based on emotional union and not the complementary nature of a man and woman in marriage. "Enacting same-sex civil marriage would therefore not be an expansion of the institution of marriage, but a redefinition" (4). This redefinition would complete the work of the sexual revolution and the revisionist viewpoint would replace the conjugal viewpoint of marriage in both law and culture. Girgis, et al. maintain that this will have a disastrous impact on marriage and the welfare of children. These differences in the conjugal and revisionist views can also explain that a culture that is experiencing a high divorce rate has no problem accepting same-sex marriage. Due to the permissiveness of the culture many people are no longer able to see the validity of the objections to gay marriage.

Historically the conjugal view of marriage has served all societies well. "Marriage is, of its essence, a comprehensive union: a union of will (by consent) and body (by sexual union); inherently ordered to procreation and thus the broad sharing of family life; and calling for permanent and exclusive commitment..." (6). Conjugal marriage has been valued and prized by individuals, couples, and societies. "It is also a moral reality: a human good with an objective structure, which it is inherently good for us to live out (6). Marriage has also been the best way to raise and educate children. Society needs well-adjusted new members and the family has proven to be an ideal structure to accomplish this.

Girgis, et al. maintain that no right exists for non-marital relationships to be recognized as marriages. If we recognize these relationships as marriages we will "obscure the shape, and so weaken the special norms, of an institution on which social order depends" (7). They argue, "it is not the conferral of benefits on same-sex relationships itself but the redefining marriage in the public mind

that bodes ill for the common good” (7). This redefinition of marriage is the heart of their objection to the definition of marriage. Many people will come to misunderstand marriage. Instead of seeing it as a comprehensive union of complementary sexes ordered to procreation and family life they will see it as essentially an emotional union limited for that period where both parties feel it is meeting their needs and demands. Once it no longer satisfies these emotional connections it will be totally appropriate to end it. If the traditional view of marriage is to survive it must do a better job of explaining why lifelong, exclusive heterosexual relationships deserve a recognition denied to other types of relationships.

Because the law teaches us what is permitted and prohibited in society, changing the definition of marriage will cause it to be misunderstood. It “will be harder to see the point of its norms, to live by them, and to urge them on others” (7). In turn our beliefs and behavior are formed by the law. Our beliefs and our behavior form our society and our views as to what is proper in marriage and child rearing. Governmental involvement in marriage can create an environment conducive to stable long lasting marriages and good conditions to form families and raise children who are the future of our society. By changing the basic definition of marriage we stand to change the societal good produced by marriage.

Girgis, et al. present an excellent discussion of the many benefits the conjugal view of marriage provides:

**Real marital fulfillment**—no one operates in a cultural vacuum. Our values are shaped by the law and future generations will be harmed by ‘warping their idea of what marriage is. It would teach them that marriage is about emotional union and cohabitation, without any inherent connections to bodily union or family life” (8). As this idea becomes the norm “their ability to realize genuine martial union would diminish” (8). This will nullify the goodness inherent in traditional marriage.

**Spousal well-being**—studies have shown that happily married spouses are healthier, happier, and wealthier than unmarried people. “As the state’s redefinition of marriage makes these norms harder to understand, cherish, justify, and live by, spouses will benefit less from the psychological and material advantages of marital stability”(8).

**Child well-being**—if same-sex relationships are recognized as marriages, “the notion that men and women bring different gifts to parenting will not be reinforced by any civil institution” (8). The social pressures and incentives for fathers to stay with families will diminish. This loss will also be true for encouraging people to reserve having children unless they are married. Studies have shown that children do best when they are raised by two natural parents.

**Friendship**—the incentive and availability to form deep friendships may diminish. “Only the conjugal view gives marriage a definite orientation to bodily union and family life” (9). Marriage remains a unique relationship for a man and a woman.

**Religious liberty**—people who hold religious views that find same-sex marriages unacceptable may face legal issues or face ostracism as being bigoted. They may also face employment issues or civil issues.

**Limited government**—the principle of subsidiarity should be the rule. The state should provide the environment for couples to want to stay together and raise families. It is not the government’s function to raise children. If the government does not have respect for individuals to assume their responsibilities “welfare and correctional bureaucracies grow” (9).

The authors clearly want us to know that their argument is not about homosexuality. They also are very clear that they do not want to express any moral or religious views on homosexuality. Their position is that the “conjugal view is not peculiar to religion, or to any religious tradition” (10). Cultures from the recording of earliest history have all reached very similar views of marriage. The authors maintain that religion did not form the historical view on marriage but it was the other way around, “It is rather marriage—the demands of a natural institution—that helped to shape our religious and philosophical traditions” (11). A strong case can be made that many of our society’s ills are caused by sexual unions outside marriage. These unions similar to same-sex marriage cause harmful consequences for family life and society.

While the authors do an excellent job of presenting their case I disagree with the exclusion of religion from the discussion. While their intent was to make their arguments more acceptable to those opposed to introducing religion in making secular decisions, religion has always had an honored role in informing its citizens what is best for both the individual and for society. An example of this is the role religion played in the civil rights movement. It is totally appropriate and in fact it is necessary to inject religion in so basic an issue as marriage. For us to raise good citizens we need to be able to pass on to future generations the values we cherish. The Christian definition of marriage is more rational than anything the secular world has to offer.

## V. The Catholic Viewpoint

The recent changes in defining marriage are not something new for the Catholic Church. The Church for the last hundred years foretold and has responded to what it perceives to be a threat to the divine institution of marriage and it has attempted to both clarify the issues involved and take steps to both

strengthen marriage within the Church and in society at large. While Catholics believe marriage is a Sacrament they also live their marriages in the secular world and they cannot ignore the changes occurring in civil marriages. To do so will weaken the total social fabric of society and make it more difficult for all marriages to thrive.

Central to understanding the Catholic view of marriage is to realize that God created marriage and as such it is not permitted for man to change it. Marriage was not created by the state and marriage would exist whether governments were involved in it or not. Marriage has existed in all cultures throughout the centuries before governments were established. While the Supreme Court may have trouble understanding this, marriage was not created to provide tax or health insurance benefits. It was created to bring a loving couple together with the possibility of conceiving and raising children.

The Catholic view on marriage begins with the secular aspects of the conjugal viewpoint. Marriage is to be faithful, permanent, and fruitful. It is for the good of the spouses which is also called the unitive purpose and also for the procreation and education of children. Couples meet, fall in love, and get married to share their lives and bodies together in sexual union. They desire this sexual union not just for pleasure but also to seal their love and personal communion and open themselves to the possibility of children. These children unite the couple into one body and family.

The Catholic view of marriage benefits both individuals and society. While Catholics also suffer from the ill effects of divorce, studies do show that people who are practicing Catholics strive to make their marriages work as they realize that remarriage after divorce may not be possible. Research also shows that married couples by their religious faith receive benefits from a good marriage. They use their faith to deal with difficult times, as a source of moral guidance in making decisions, and dealing with conflict.

The Catholic viewpoint provides stability. In a world where truth is so relative following Catholic teachings gives guidance and strength to marriages and families. Our society has no demand for truth and without truth we are defenseless. "A person's freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom" (FC 11).

Scripture provides the basis to understand Catholic marriages. In *Matthew 19*, Jesus addresses both marriage and divorce, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator "made them male and female" and said, "for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." Jesus tells us very clearly

that marriage is both exclusive and permanent. He guides us to look to the Creation to see what God intended 'from the beginning'.

God is the Creator of the universe and is the author of marriage. *Genesis* 1:27 says, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." We are part of this created natural order and as such we were created and are from him. Marriage is part of God's created order and it is not simply of our own making and choosing. God made the sexual difference of male and female and ordered each to the other. God made them complementary (the sexuality of the male is only complete in relation to the female and the sexuality of the female is only complete in relation to the male). We were made to be given to each other. *Gaudium et Spes* says, "Man is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, and he cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" (GS 24). *Genesis* 2:23 expresses this truth symbolically: "this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." Mary Healy in *Men & Women Are From Eden* states that Adam recognized in Eve someone he could love who would be his equal. "He recognized in Eve—unlike the animals—an equal, a person like himself whom he could love. That is, he saw someone to whom he could give himself completely and who could receive and reciprocate his gift to form a union that would fulfill the very meaning of their existence"(15).

Vatican II advocated a renewal of the Church in a twofold dynamic of *Aggiornamento* (bringing up to date) and *Ressourcement* (return to earlier sources, traditions, and symbols of the early Church). Vatican II wished to enrich the faith of the Church by formulating the Gospel message of Christ for the modern age and desired to present to the world a modern synthesis of faith and reason. At the heart of this synthesis is the modern concept of personhood. Haas says there is an "unfortunate tendency since the Council, however, for theologians to write as though there had been a radical break in the life and teachings of the Church which occurred with the Council" (Haas 340). He adds, "Because *Gaudium et Spes* uses the more biblical language of covenant rather than contract to speak of marriage does not mean the two are incompatible. Indeed, a covenant is itself a kind of contract. And the preconciliar magisterium spoke of marriage as covenant as well as contract" (340).

In Catholic theology marriage has had two traditional purposes: the continuation of the race through procreation and the mutual love of the spouses. From the late middle ages to Vatican II the first was considered primary, with mutual love in community as secondary. The 1917 Code of Canon Law in Canon 1013 codifies this: "The primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of children; the secondary end is mutual help and a remedy for concupiscence"

(Haas 340). Today the Catholic tradition once again sees an equal importance to both the goods and ends of marriage.

Pope Pius XI issued *Casti Connubii* in 1930 in response to threats on marriage. It is interesting that “The evils threatening marriage which he mentions in the encyclical sound remarkably contemporary: contraception, abortion, sterilization, adultery, trial marriages, cohabitation, religiously mixed marriages, and divorce” (341-342). Haas informs us that these errors stem from the modern misunderstanding that “marriage is not a divine institution but rather a human institution established by the arbitrary wills of human beings” (342). *Casti Connubii* 5 affirms that as an immutable and inviolable doctrine “matrimony was not instituted or restored by man but by God; not by man were the laws made to strengthen and confirm and elevate it but by God, the Author of nature, and by Christ Our Lord by Whom nature was redeemed, and hence these laws cannot be subject to any human decrees or to any contrary pact even of the spouses themselves.” *Casti Connubii* defends the authority for this statement: “This is the doctrine of Holy Scripture; this is the constant tradition of the Universal Church; this the solemn definition of the sacred Council of Trent, which declares and establishes from the words of Holy Writ itself that God is the Author of the perpetual stability of the marriage bond, its unity and its firmness” (CC 5).

At Vatican II, when the Council Fathers “were debating the texts on marriage and the family...there was considerable discussion as to the nature of the text and the language which would be used in it” (344). The question of the “hierarchical ordering of the ends of marriage was very much in the background of the discussion” (344). When *Gaudium et Spes* was issued in a “less technically, philosophical, theological, and juridical vocabulary in teaching about and regulating marriage” (345).

Vatican II deliberately refused to rank the goods of marriage. *Gaudium et Spes* speaks instead of love and faithfulness as the two goods of marriage, without subordinating one to the other (GS 47-48). Aquinas and Augustine did not do this ranking and gave importance to the good of “society” (i.e. the relationship itself) in marriage. Vatican II was a genuine advance in Church teaching, and it meant a basic shift from a legalistic view of marriage as a contract to a more personal, biblical view of marriage as a covenant. This finding is in conformity with the more personalized and existential modern viewpoint but also a return to the teachings of the early fathers (Patristic and Medieval periods) and scholastics like Aquinas.

“As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them” (GS 48). This is the heart of marriage. “For as God of old

made himself present to his people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony" (GS 48). Healy says "the nuptial meaning of the body is our call to self-giving love, which is written into our very embodiment as male or female" (24-25).

The Christian married couple, with their children, forms an image of the Trinitarian God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Marriage and family life mirror the Trinity in two ways. First, like the Trinity, marriage is a communion of love between co-equal persons, beginning with husband and wife and extending to all members of the family. Second, just as Trinity's love is life-giving, a married couple's love conceives and cares for children. By giving ourselves to each other we become "a communion of persons, we learn to love and be loved as God loves, and so fulfill our highest destiny" (25).

In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II tells us that in the modern world "there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being" (FC 6). The "family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do" (FC 17). The role of the family that it is called by God to perform in history derives from what the family is. Its role involves the dynamic and existential development of what it was created by God to be. This development is not historical or cultural in which case it could be seen as changing or evolving towards same-sex marriage.

He tells families to "become what you are" (FC 17). He tells families they must go back to the "beginning of God's creative act." "The family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love, in an effort that will find fulfillment, as will everything created and redeemed, in the Kingdom of God" (FC 17). The family has the mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love. This is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ for his bride the Church. Every task of the family should be in accordance with the furtherance of the mission.

To understand marriage it is good to look at its teleology. "One understands what a thing is by virtue of what it does, by virtue of the end toward which it is ordered" (Haas 349). Any given thing, such as marriage, may have more than one end and then it becomes necessary to identify which end best adequately defines a thing. Looking at marriage, "If one looks at the ends of marriage in terms of child, mutual support, and a remedy for concupiscence, it is not too difficult to identify the one which most adequately explains the institution of marriage"(349). As Girgis maintains many relationships can

provide mutual support. Same-sex relationships, two brothers, two college friends who live together or any other possible group who choose to live together could provide this support. Marriage is not necessary solely for mutual support. "Of the three ends, the one which is completely unique to marriage is the procreation and education of children" (350). Haas informs us that Aquinas taught: "The child is the most essential good of marriage, second is faith, and third the sacrament" (350). This is not to minimize faith and sacrament but it "merely affirms that what is most essential to marriage among its goods is the child. It most adequately, in the final analysis, explains why people get married and what is unique about the institution of marriage" (350).

People are confused regarding the proper end of marriage. They think of marriage in a context where sexual relations can occur. "But the Catholic philosophical and theological tradition teaches that sexual activity is hardly an end in itself. It is ordered toward an end beyond itself which is still intrinsic to it and ultimately makes sense of it" (350).

The family is a community of persons; of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons. Without love the family cannot live, grow, and perfect itself as a community of persons. Grace, especially that given through the marriage sacrament and baptism makes this self-donation possible. All members of the family are called to live in love with one another. The Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world. The family should not "live closed in on itself, but remains open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others as well as by a consciousness of its responsibilities towards the whole of society" (FC 64).

The family also has the obligation to serve life. This is done first by the transmission of human life and secondarily by the education of the children. The love of spouses must always be open to the transmission of life. The spouses have an obligation to educate their children especially in terms of what is most important to what makes for authentic human living God. Parents should teach by word but more importantly by example.

Pope John Paul in *Redemptor Hominis*, 10 says that "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."

The goal of marriage is to live an interpersonal communion which by grace shares in the *Perichoresis* of the Trinity in which the distinctiveness of the Persons is maintained in the indwelling of each Person in the Others. The married couple becomes a communion of persons in which each person is fully

present to, is fully known, and loved by the other. If a couple has a strong love then there is a strong family and in turn a strong community. Marriage and family equals a covenant and community. There is mutual self-giving, mutual knowing, and mutual loving. Communion should be goal of family. As God lives in a Trinity so we should also on earth.

## **VI. Conclusion**

We have become a contraceptive culture and sex is no longer associated with procreation and instead of being reserved for marriage it has become a form of recreation or leisure activity. Marriage's permanence and exclusivity have lost their importance. For this type of culture same-sex marriage as well as other once taboo relationships become logical extensions as to what is acceptable. When a culture is driven primarily by a pleasure principle all forms of living arrangements seem equally valid. Unless we as a culture begin to reconcile what is best for all of society with our own individual fulfillment we do not have much hope to turn the tide. These two goals are not always opposed although at times there can be a conflict. Individual fulfillment is best found in conforming to Christ. We need to refocus that sex is a gift from God that allows us to participate in the work of creation and as a Sacrament in the work of the new creation.

Marriage is intrinsically oriented to conceiving and raising children. This can only occur for heterosexual couples. Conceiving and raising children brings fulfillment to a couple and in their flesh they become one and create an organic bond by cooperating in the generation of new life. Same-sex couples cannot do this. While they may be able to form an emotional and spiritual union they cannot reach an organic bond. They cannot conceive and raise children together as a couple. If we change the definition of marriage we will obscure what it means. Instead of being a complementary union of people who join together to conceive and raise new life it will become a joining in friendship that can easily dissolved once the emotional needs of either party are not being satisfied. Marriage is too important to allow changes in its fundamental definition.

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