

HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE IN LIGHT OF THE  
INCARNATION

*Marriage, symbol, and the **Imago Dei***

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Jefferson S. Labala

**To**

**Nohn Ley Kou and Sei Gongbe Labala, with a heart full of gratitude,  
and deep appreciation for your implicit trust and unconditional  
love as my parents, and your dedication to the Church of Jesus Christ**

**SO GOD CREATED HUMANKIND... IN THE IMAGE OF GOD...MALE AND  
FEMALE GOD CREATED THEM (Genesis 1:27)**

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## FOREWORD

“We invite the reader now to join us in reflecting on marriage in a different light. This way of thinking about marriage changes some of the questions to be asked, and indeed places marriage in a whole new category.”

With this straightforward statement, the Reverend Dr. Jefferson S. Labala, a friend and partner in ministry for more than thirty years, does precisely that: He uses an “incarnational paradigm” to articulate an understanding of Christian marriage that is fascinating and thought-provoking, as well as theologically and biblically sound. In light of this conception of marriage, he evaluates whether or not homosexual marriage is a valid Christian option. He goes on to present some of the most compelling and insightful theological refutation of homosexual marriage as a valid option for Christians ever advanced. His approach is novel and refreshing, logical and coherent, spiritually illuminating and nuanced.

Marriage is presented as a “theological symbol [which] reflects a spiritual reality: the nature of [personal being as interpersonal reality].” As a symbol marriage “derives its meaning... from the structure in which it appears by bringing together the distinctive elements of [a thing, in this case] the human being [as male and female].” This structure of marriage “has a logical and intrinsic connection to that which marriage symbolizes.” Labala then sets out to elucidate and justify this theological assertion in the clearest, most analytical and skillful and persuasive manner. Dr. Labala grounds the theological structure of marriage in the nature and relationship in the Triune God. By so doing, he provides the marriage structure an ontological underpinning.

The presentation is profound and eye opening. While this is a theological work, it is accessible to the non-theological mind. It is easy to read and well written.

This work challenges all parties to the debate to think critically, soberly, clearly, and as faithful Christians and become clear regarding the ramifications of any position held on this issue. Even for those who hold a different view, they will be impressed by the logic, coherence and the force of the arguments in this book.

I find the book very helpful in many respects as a Christian and the ministry context in which I serve. The work makes a very significant theological contribution to this serious issue that has the potential of tearing the church asunder, in the particular, the church in the U.S. This is a must reading for all pastors, church leaders, and those Christians who sincerely care about truth, the church, and fidelity to the Gospel of Christ Jesus. I commend this book with great enthusiasm.

The Rt. Reverend John G. Innis, PhD

Bishop, Liberia Area

The United Methodist Church

## A MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Many years ago, I did some reflection on the subject of homosexual marriage; I did not have it published. Spring forward today. I had a spiritual experience that challenged my view and attitude regarding homosexual marriage. For you see, I had come to believe this was a subject many believers were making a big deal about, especially those who opposed it. Although I was opposed to it, I had come to learn to live with the situation. If some Christians felt all right about it, it was their view. I had my opinion. I believed in allowing others having their views: Live and let live became my attitude about this issue.

Through a Christian forum and by coincidence, I befriended a Christian who was interested in theological discussions. I was profoundly struck by the commitment of this person as a Christian. The person was a sincere believer in Christ in every way. During my friendship with this person, I was asked a difficult theological question on one of those issues theologians have struggled with for centuries. As I too struggled to formulate an answer to this difficult question, I had a profound spiritual experience in the process that troubled me for many months. As I began wrestling with this difficult question, I was seriously agitated in my spirit. *Why would I be so troubled in my spirit over a question as if I was doing something wrong in attempting to answer it, though profound the question may be?* I asked myself. Then suddenly I realized God was telling me something. I prayed asking the Lord to illumine my understanding. During this same period, I was contemplating revising for publication the manuscript I had worked on years earlier.

One day during a time of prayer and meditation, the illumination regarding my spiritual experience months earlier came to me. It was as clear as daylight. God shared

with me insights that left an indelible impression on me. Here are a few of them relative to the subject matter of this book:

1. Truth is very important; the attitude with which we communicate truth is as important as the truth itself.
2. Homosexual marriage is a grave issue that will cause many to lose their souls – both opponents and proponents alike.
3. I should rethink my position and attitude on this issue.
4. I should write this book, but my primary focus this time should be different.

It is this illumination regarding my spiritual experience that is the immediate impetus for this work. I had to write anew what I had written years before – for those seeking for understanding in particular, and the church in general. But what was I to write? *I turned to the Lord in earnest for guidance and understanding regarding what to write.*

Sisters and brothers of the household of faith, I address you in this book. I hope and pray that I have been faithful in transmitting the insights and truths I have gleaned from my study of the issue and my personal fellowship with the Lord for understanding. I hope and pray also that *my attitude has been one of love* for God's people. Our intention is to speak the truth in love. Where we have failed to do so, we ask forgiveness. It should be reiterated that these are insights borne out of personal, sober reflection, study, and *guidance* from the Lord as much as we have been able to discern such guidance. We present it as a gracious offering to the church of Christ as she wrestles with this all-important issue.

## INTRODUCTION

Human beings are sexual beings who live in a world of possibilities as well as limitations. Some of these limitations are natural while others are moral. Some are social while others are spiritual. Human beings are moral agents who live in a moral order. *The moral order places certain moral limitations on what is morally permissible even though some of these things may be natural. Just because something is natural does not make it morally right.* It is natural to have sexual attraction toward one of the opposite gender. It is also natural for a male to have sexual intimacy with a female. It does not follow from these naturally endowed urges that it is morally permissible for a male to have sexual intimacy with any female, for example, another man's wife, or even worse one's own mother. *Morality places certain limits on doing what is natural.*

Human beings are social beings who live in community with other human beings. As such, there are communal as well as personal responsibilities and obligations to be carried out and limitations to be observed. *Living in community entails boundaries – social, moral, communal as well as personal boundaries – to be recognized and respected for the proper ordering of our life as social beings who are also moral agents.*

Human beings are spiritual beings. We are created in the image of the Almighty Creator. As such, while we share certain characteristics in common with lower forms of life, we are called to live above the natural instincts and impulses that connect us to these lower forms of life such as animals and insects. As spiritual beings, our actions are not primarily dictated by our natural instincts and impulses like those lowly creatures. We humans as spiritual beings have transcendent quality to our life. There is a higher divine purpose for which we have been created. Such divine purpose calls us to live above the

natural impulses of creaturely existence. There is the natural instinct of self-preservation. The higher divine purpose may call for self-sacrifice for the sake of others in some instances, or in being faithful to God in Christ when called to renounce our faith in Christ Jesus. There is the natural impulse of hunger that calls us to fulfill our hunger need. Our spiritual purpose may call upon us to give up food for a period of time and fast to get closer to God in communion and fellowship in order to discern God's purpose more clearly during such time. Or, such divine purpose may cause us to abstain from sexual intimacy with our spouse for a period of time, or it may call for a lifetime of celibacy for wholehearted devotion to God's call upon our life. Thus, our higher spiritual purpose may call upon us to go against and live above these natural instincts and impulses.

*We are bearers of the image of God.* We are related to the Divine in ways that lower forms of life are not: we are created in the likeness of the Almighty. As such we share some attributes of the Divine. *Our pattern of life as spiritual beings is the pattern of the Divine.* There is a reflection of the Divine pattern of life in human existence to be emulated as a prerequisite for the fulfillment of our divine purpose. All this goes to say as Christians, no matter what our views regarding homosexual marriage, there are certain truths in creation for us to recognize and accept as social, moral, and spiritual reality. This truism may be stated differently—there is a Divine purpose to human life and linked to creation.

Anyone who is reading this book knows that the purpose of the eyes is to see. Anyone who is thinking about the subject matter of this book knows that the purpose of the mind is to think or reflect on issues. However, in the present discussion regarding homosexual marriage, sadly for many Christians, the theological purpose and

significance of marriage have become as confused as ever, along with the spiritual meaning of marriage in the context of human relationships and our God-relatedness.

It seems when a society becomes technologically advanced, it tends to lose sight of simple truths, even self-evident truths. *Just because advances in Science can find or create substitute for the natural, such advances should not negate or do away with the norm or the normal uses of these things.* There cannot be a substitute if there is not the genuine or the norm to begin with. What are some simple truths? **Whatever God creates, God has purpose for such creation.** From this theological truism, we observe such simple truths:

The ears are meant for hearing.

The eyes are meant for seeing.

The feet are meant for walking and running.

Our minds are for thinking.

It follows from these simple truths that:

*God created us male and female for a purpose.* Such simple truths seem to be overlooked at times, or conflated in the current controversy.

What sets the marital relationship apart from all other relationships is *sex*. This much should be acknowledged! However, some individuals would refuse to accept the obvious. No wonder the confusion in this issue. One who is not committed to the truth will not give assent to the facts, no matter how obvious. *If we all cannot agree that we are alive, how can we start a discussion?* In this disagreement is an obvious contradiction: You cannot disagree if you are not alive. In a sense this depicts the current situation surrounding homosexual marriage – all Christians do not agree on some basics

and in this lies the obvious contradiction. Many advocates of homosexual marriage say this is not about *sex* while all the while they are discussing *sexual* orientation as the basis for their advocacy.

*Homosexual marriage* is the focus of this reflection. It is *the practice of a person marrying another of the same gender*. This practice is gradually gaining ground in the United States. Some European countries, mostly from the European Union, already recognize same-sex marriage. Other countries such as South Africa and Canada also do. Some countries such the United Kingdom recognize some form of same-sex union, e.g. civil union. The need for recognition and acceptance of this life-style by some Christians has become a serious issue of discussion in the church of Jesus Christ. No denominations or Christian groups can afford to bury their head in the sand and ignore it or wish it away. This issue is spreading all over the world, even in places once thought of as unthinkable. Churches around the world must be prepared to deal with this issue. At the least, every true Christian believer needs to reflect on this practice and become very clear about what is at stake and the implications for the church of Christ.

The critical and primary focus in this essay is this: *Should homosexual marriage become a valid Christian option?* What does this question mean? It means:

1. Should the church of Jesus Christ accept homosexual marriage as a normative Christian practice?
2. Is homosexual marriage one way Christian marriage may be practiced?
3. Is homosexual marriage compatible with the Christian Faith?
4. Does homosexual marriage also fulfill God's purpose for which God instituted marriage?

These four questions clarify for the reader what we intend by the primary question.

Certain things need to be made very clear at the outset of this reflection:

1. We are not dealing per se with the issue of being homosexual but with the practice of homosexual marriage. While the two issues are inextricably intertwined, *we will focus our attention on the institution of marriage in light of homosexual union in the Christian context.* Stated another way, we are not reflecting on the homosexual orientation, but the practice involved in such orientation as homosexual marriage. We want to delve into the theological essence of marriage in the Christian sense and illumine this practice for the primary question. *The work is therefore theological and spiritual in nature.*
2. Marriage is not a Christian institution. However, there is a Christian perspective and understanding of marriage. We are writing of marriage in the Christian context.
3. Marriage like creation, is a given. The institution of marriage was not established by human beings; even though, marriage is practiced by human societies. Phrased differently, marriage as an institution did not come into existence by human convention such as the African Union, NATO, the European Union or the United Nations. Marriage is an integral part of the order of creation. This is to say marriage has a Divine origin – an origin in God.
4. The issue of homosexuality is a complex one. Since this reflection is an essay, the content will center primarily on an attempt to answer the primary question set forth earlier: *Should homosexual marriage become a valid Christian practice?*

For many Christians who believe homosexual marriage is not a valid Christian option, their major reason is what the Bible says regarding homosexual practice. The serious problem with this major objection, especially for Christians who are deeply concerned about civil rights consideration of the individual, is that it was not too long ago that the Bible was being used in a superficial way to justify slavery and deny women from entering the preaching ministry. And this last practice of denying the female from entering the ordained ministry is still going on in some denominations today. Many Christians are therefore leery of using the Bible in the same superficial way to object to homosexual marriage. They want sound, compelling, and profound theological reasons before they object to homosexual marriage in the church. There are also Christians who are not sure one way or the other where they stand on this issue. They too are seeking compelling reasons and spiritual guidance in order to take a stand on solid theological ground. The debate is very serious, and could become much more so, and bring about major schism in some denominations.

All reasons so far by major and serious theological scholars against homosexual marriage have, for the most part, not been persuasive or profound. Also, arguments for homosexual marriage have lack theological depths as well. It is this lack of theological, spiritual depth and cogency to the arguments against homosexual marriage, and thus the need for thoughtful, compelling theological reasons that this book seeks to address.

The reflection begins with a discussion of authority and the significance of speaking authoritatively, in this case, as a Christian about homosexual marriage. Next, we consider this authority in relation to our method of theological reflection, and the interpretation of Scriptures in an attempt to relate the same to this issue. We set forth

some themes, which are taken up and developed in later chapters, as the backdrop for the conception of marriage to be put forth. This is followed by a summary of the major arguments in support of homosexual marriage and the major theological flaw in all of these arguments. We take up in the chapter following that the concept of marriage in light of a sacramental and moral universe. We then consider the Christian and the moral life and how it relates to the issue. Next, we present marriage as a spiritual or theological *symbol* of profound significance in human community. On the basis of the conception of marriage presented, we then analyze homosexual marriage to ascertain its adequacy, as the spiritual symbol marriage has been ordained to be. We then address some allegations and arguments in support of homosexual marriage, which may seem to undercut our position on the subject. The closing comments bring the essay to a close.

What is at stake in the issue of homosexual marriage? For some persons, this is simply a matter of one's sexual preference, a private affair. For others it is much to do about nothing. And still for others, a matter of justice and equality. *From the Christian point of view and when properly understood, marriage is not about one's sexual preference, or just a private affair, or simply a matter of justice. The issue is much more profound. Homosexual marriage strikes at the very heart of what it means to be created in the image of God.* It touches the very core of human existence as sexual, moral, spiritual being. Homosexual marriage has to do with the spiritual significance of the institution of marriage and its existential implications for ordering our life as sexual, moral, spiritual beings. *This issue is inextricably linked to our God-relatedness and the authentic symbolization of this relatedness in the human community.* This essay will deal with this God-relatedness and the authentic *symbolization* of this in the human

community through marriage. Stated in this way *homosexual marriage is outright spiritual and theological, and thus a weighty issue.*

This is the work of a Practical theologian. Practical Theology is critical reflection upon the faith and practice of the church in order to guide the church in its life and ministry. We are reflecting on the faith of the church in light of the call to make homosexual marriage a valid Christian practice, thus as an acceptable practice in the church. Some Christians are against this. Is this opposition theologically sound upon critically reflection? Or, is this opposition similar to a grievous error as in time past when the church (although opposed by some), on the basis on Scriptures, erred by allowing the practice of slavery by Christians? We bring insights from the incarnation, that is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus and the whole process by which God took on human nature and became a human being in Jesus, to shed new light on this controversial issue and illumine the spiritual and theological dimension of this subject matter.

This reflection is done from an African theological perspective; therefore, certain themes will feature prominently in this work, some of which are authority, the relationship between the Gospel and culture, community, value system, and symbolism. It should be acknowledged that every theological reflection is done from some perspective.

## BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

We humans learn about authority very early in life and employ it in a variety of circumstances. A three year-old child stands at attention and places the right hand over the heart as the national flag is being hoisted. Later, the child is asked why did the child do that? The response, “I saw daddy doing it.” A little girl tells another little girl not to sit a certain way because, “Mama says it is not right for little girls to sit that way.” As we get older our sources of authority expand, change or are replaced. Have you ever watched a dispute among intelligent adults? If you pay careful attention, they will be making references to various sources of authority. While they may not necessarily mention the word *authority*, it will be very clear from their references that they are, indeed, appealing to various authorities to buttress their position regarding the issue under consideration. In the court of law, the constitution of the country is the supreme authority the lawyers appeal to in making their case before the judge.

A close friend was sharing with me how his teenage son no more listens to him. Everything is “about Mr. Jackson his teacher,” and what this teacher tells him. Then the friend said something interesting, “My son forgets that Mr. Jackson is the father of one of his school mates. He is no longer listening to me his father but to his friend’s father.” Here, one father has in essence replaced another father as the authority for this teenager. But was this teenager aware? In reality, the teenager was viewing Mr. Jackson not as a father authority but as a *different kind of authority*. As a typical teenager, Mr. Jackson’s son was no longer listening to Mr. Jackson either. In a way, we adults sometimes act like these teenagers when it comes to authority. As we replace one authority for another, or expand our sources of authority, it should be borne in mind that we humans can never do

without some form of authority. This point must be made clear. At the most basic level as we mature, some of us become our own authority. In some cultural contexts the traditions serve as a very important authority, and so are the council of elders and our parents. In a sense the council of elders are the custodians of the traditions of such communities. **AUTHORITY IS INTEGRAL TO THE ORDER OF CREATION.** It is built into the very fabric of human society. *We cannot do without some form of authority. The government is the basic and exemplary civil authority in human society.*

By what authority do you speak? Jesus on more than one occasion was asked precisely this question by the religious authorities of his day. By what authority he spoke and did the things he did? As Christians and therefore followers of Jesus Christ, we should expect to be asked the same question when we speak on issues in the Christian sense. As Christians expressing Christian point of view as the church, we are in essence speaking in the name of Jesus Christ. At the least, he has influenced our opinion, beliefs or views on the issues under consideration in some way. Speaking on issue in the Christian sense means broadly speaking, bringing a Christian point of view to bear on the issue: Our view on the issue has been influenced, formed and informed by Christian perspective, or by the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. If not, it is questionable if such speaking is Christian in any meaningful sense of the word.

Since we human beings cannot do without some kind of authority, *we Christians especially need to be very clear about the authority with which we speak as Christians when we speak regarding homosexual marriage. When we characterize homosexual marriage as a valid Christian option or not, we need to be very clear and explicit: What is our authority?* We cannot speak with authority as Christians and express a Christian

viewpoint, and expect other Christians to accept such viewpoint when our point of view is not informed and backed by the authority that has given rise to the Christian Faith in the first place. This is at the heart of the controversy: **BY WHAT AUTHORITY DO WE SPEAK?**

It seems to us from the Christian perspective that **a significant part of the homosexual marriage debate in the church in the United States hinges on authority and our understanding of such authority regarding this issue.** To be sure there are other issues involved. Central to them, however, is the issue of authority and our understanding of that authority for the issue. When this issue of authority is settled and its understanding regarding homosexual marriage, then much of the debate will fall into proper perspective: We either accept the Christian authority and its understanding of the issue or not. And if the latter, then we will seek for other authority (Science, individual rights, equality, the law of the land, etc.) that supports our viewpoint; or, we will create our own authority and submit to it. In any case, the Christian authority is no more binding. It then becomes doubtful if one is still following a Christian teaching, belief or practice in this matter. If not, on what basis should other Christians be asked to accept one's point of view as legitimately Christian? **The point is the legitimate basis for asserting any Christian position on this issue and any issue is the Christian authority.**

In light of what has been said, we need to set forth the Christian authority on which this reflection is based. Sometimes we Christians are not appealing to the same authority; or, we understand the authority in quite not the same way. Some Christians no longer recognize the normative Christian authority as binding or informing their beliefs

and practice. Other Christians have created their own authority and submitted to it while others have gone looking for authority other than the Christian authority to give legitimacy to their point of view on this issue. By what authority do you speak?

What is our authority as Christian on which this reflection is based? In fact, what is authority? According to Webster's Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, *authority is "legitimate power to influence or command thought, opinion or behavior."* If one, in this case, a Christian believes that homosexual marriage is a valid Christian practice, what is the legitimate power that has influenced this belief and practice? By what authority does a Christian assert such belief and practice is valid or not? A Christian in light of this definition of authority is one whose faith and practice have been influenced and shaped by the legitimate Christian power. The ultimate authority for the Christian is the God revealed in Jesus the Christ and his redemptive work mediated through the Scriptures. *The authentic Christian is one who has been grasped by the reality of God in Christ Jesus, and in consequence thereof, graciously submits to the authority of this God in Christ, and has one's life so directed and ordered in light of this reality.* To be a Christian is therefore to be a *follower* of Christ in faith and practice, and have one's view of life shaped by Christ and his redemptive message. In short, **CHRIST BECOMES ONE'S AUTHORITY IN MATTER OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.** It is the authority of this reality by which we will speak on this issue. People can and may appeal to various sources of authority. **WHAT FINALLY MATTERS FOR THE CHRISTIAN IN THIS MATTER IS THE ULTIMATE CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY.** By what authority do you speak on this issue? It makes a tremendous difference!

Some Christians may speak of other authorities such as ministers of the gospel, bishops, church traditions or law, councils, and the pope. They are authoritative, but limited authority. *They are all derivative authority: they do not have authority in and of themselves. Theologically, these are authoritative insofar as what they express or clarify are in accordance with the view of the ultimate Christian authority.*

But how do we understand this authority and how such authority informs our understanding of the subject at hand? This will be taken up in subsequent chapters. For now, we simply want to state that, one, no Christian can discuss this issue meaningfully in the church as a matter of faith and practice without addressing the issue of authority for one's faith and belief; two, to state as clearly as possible the Christian authority so that there is no ambiguity about this authority in our reflection. One cannot, on the one hand, claim to be a Christian and disregard the view of this ultimate Christian authority in this matter, and on the other, purport to be expressing a Christian viewpoint on this issue. That much must be clear. It must also be asserted that one cannot follow one's own authority in matters of faith and practice and still be a Christian; for to be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ in one's faith and practice. How can such a person be a believer in the true sense of the word? If a Christian, what then does the person believe? At the least, one who follows oneself in the sense above is an errant believer and therefore in error. In such cases, the church or individual Christians have no legitimate basis to entertain or accept such personal views as a valid Christian perspective.

Of course, individual Christians may hold different opinions on a range of issues. However, if some of these Christians claim their particular opinion is a valid Christian understanding, and they want other Christians to subscribe to their particular view as

such, these Christians have the obligation to show such claim is legitimate. The question then becomes, what is the criterion for legitimacy? *The point for us here is the criterion for legitimacy is the Christian authority.* While we as Christians may disagree on what precisely is the nature of that authority and how it is to be applied, there can be no disagreement on the point that the criterion for legitimacy of a Christian's claim to such Christian view on the issue, as far as the Christian community is concerned, is the ultimate Christian authority. But how do we in the theological sense bring to bear this authority on the issue at hand, or for that matter, any issue of importance for the Christian life of faith? We take up now this part of the reflection in the next chapter.

# AUTHORITY, METHOD, AND INTERPRETATION

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with authority in relation to our method of theological reflection. It also covers Scriptures and the interpretation and application of Scriptures. It presents certain important themes, which are later lifted up and discussed relative to the subject matter. In a sense, this chapter lays the foundation for the rest of the book in how we bring the authority to bear on the subject matter.

## AUTHORITY AND METHOD

The basis for making any valid claim to Christian knowledge and understanding is God's self-disclosure in Christ Jesus. *The incarnation becomes the precondition for making any legitimate Christian theological assertion; although, such assertion need not be limited to the incarnation.* However, for such an assertion to be considered Christian understanding, it must be informed and normed by the self-disclosure of God in Jesus the Christ. Without this self-disclosure made known in the incarnation, there would be no distinctive Christian way of viewing and interpreting in the explicit sense of the word. Indeed, without the incarnation there would be no Christian religion, hence no distinctive Christian perspective on any given issue including moral issues. We must therefore assert that the self-disclosure of God in Christ Jesus is decisive for Christian understanding and meaning of existence.

But this Christian authority is known in the explicit Christian sense through the Scriptures. Phrased differently, *the ultimate authority for the Christian community is the God made known in Jesus the Christ; however, the objective concrete sources to which we turn for this authority are the Scriptures.*

God's self-disclosure is within a community of human beings. While God may create out of nothing God does not reveal God-self to nothing.<sup>1</sup> There is always an object of God's revelation. God's self-disclosure then occurs within a community wherein God's will is made known to shape and order the life of people under the reign of God. *The fullness of life which God in Christ brings, is to be experienced in living in the will of God – living in fellowship with God through Christ, and in loving relationship with one's fellow human beings. True freedom is to be found in obedience to the Divine will. Only in losing one's life in the Divine will is true life experienced; only in giving one's life in God's love can one find the true meaning to one's existence.* The authentic Christian life is properly speaking a life in fellowship with God through Christ and in community with one's fellow human beings, a life of faithful witness. More will be said later, but for now suffice it to say to be a Christian means living under the lordship of the incarnate God in faith by God's grace in community with one's fellow human beings.

Given that the self-disclosure of God in Christ Jesus is decisive for Christian understanding and the meaning of existence, we “regard the taking on of humanity by [God] as the key-feature by which all of God's work in the world and [God's] purposes for it are to be understood “by the Christian community.”<sup>2</sup> *Our method of theological reflection is therefore incarnational.* Briefly stated the essence of the incarnation is that God takes on humanity (human nature) while still remaining fully God. Jesus Christ who is the incarnate God is by nature truly God and truly human, thus the God-man by nature in the incarnation. This is the central affirmation of the Christian religion.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (ed). *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1969), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Lord and Donald White, *A Theological Glossary* (The religious Education Press, 1969), 60.

In the experience of the divine-human encounter in Jesus the Christ, the ultimate and absolute has become enculturated in the person of Jesus Christ. The incarnation is the intersection of the absolute and the relative, “the universal and the particular.” At that point of intersection, both the absolute and relative, “the universal and particular” are encountered at that point of intersection. By so doing, the absolute and relative, the “universal and particular” are affirmed in Jesus the Christ.<sup>3</sup>

In the incarnation, there is continuity with God by means of Jesus’ divinity, and there is continuity with human beings by means of Jesus’ human nature. There is continuity with the past by means of the divinity of Christ, for he is from all eternity one with God who is eternal.<sup>4</sup> The human nature, which the Son of God assumes in the incarnation, is the new element. Thus in the incarnation there is the phenomenon of continuity as well as discontinuity, an element of permanence as well as change, the element of transcendence as well as temporality. There is the element of universality as well as particularity. And Jesus is the Living Word of God.

The above feature applies to the Scriptures as the Word of God as well.<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon of permanence and change regarding the Scriptures is supported by Jesus’ own statement. He said on one occasion regarding the Old Testament, “Do not think I came to do away with the Law or the prophets, but to fulfill [them]” (Matthew 5:17). Later he said, “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...”(Matthew 5:38). The word *but* denotes discontinuity, thus change; and Jesus went on to say things different

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to J. Philip Wogaman for this phrase, “the universal and the particular.”

<sup>4</sup> By incarnation is meant the entire process by which the Almighty God becomes a human being (takes on human nature) and dwells on earth as Jesus Christ. See Appendix A for more details on the incarnation as a theological method.

<sup>5</sup> For a full discussion, see the author’s book, *Incarnation And the Nature of Scriptures: exorcising the ghost of Marcion* (Long Island City, NY: Seaburn Publishing Group, 77-89), 2012

from what the Old Testament teaches regarding how believers ought to act. Jesus by his very nature and teaching therefore established the incarnational paradigm regarding an understanding of Scriptures as the Word of God.

The incarnation exemplifies these features in a remarkable way. It exhibits the particularity principle - God discloses God-self as the God for all peoples by taking on human nature and becoming a member of a particular people, the Jews, in conveying the message of salvation. But the incarnate God is not just any human being, but a *particular* human being, a male Jew with a *specific* cultural identity. Thus, God identified with all human beings by taking on human nature as a particular individual with a particular cultural identity. “The universal nature of the gospel message which proclaims faith in Christ... is therefore rooted in particularity.”<sup>6</sup> The incarnation expresses the fundamental axiom for God’s work and operation in the world: **The loving and gracious will of God finds expression in particular concrete form.** More will be said later, for now we can see examples of this axiom as creation, the earth, human being as male and female, and the church.<sup>7</sup> While God’s action may be universal in scope, its expression is always particular and specific. The Christian God is therefore a personal God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob...

The incarnation also exhibits an ontological-existential structure to existence, especially human existence; that is to say, it displays otherworldly as well as this worldly features. We see that the incarnate Christ is both divine and human. We also see that human being is created in the image of God. We observe that there is a spiritual as well as a physical dimension to reality. These are indications of the ontological–existential

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<sup>6</sup> Nissiotis Nikos, “The Gospel in A Time of Revelation,” *One World* (Geneva, 1975), 16.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller and detailed presentation see my work, *Through African Eyes* (New York: Seaburn Publishing Group, 2009), pp. 112f.

structure of human existence. The human person has one's being-in-the world only in and through relation to God and to one's fellow beings. You and I become what we were meant to be in and through our relation to God and our fellow human beings. Stated differently, we are both spirit and body. There is a spiritual dimension to our life as well as a physical or bodily aspect to our life. As creatures we humans are connected to, and share characteristics with, other creatures. Having been created in the image of God, we are connected to God in some sense, and share some characteristics of the Divine. As such we can fellowship with God. As creatures, we have bodily needs to fulfill like other living creatures, and are subject to the law of nature. We are finite and subject to death. On the other hand, we are transcendent beings, who when truly and fully connected to our divine origin, can break through creaturely limitations. In short we exhibit divine qualities. We can walk on water, defy the law of gravity, and our body is not subject to corruption and decay. In light of this ontological-existential reality, it can be seen why procreation is an act of the Divine as well as human. Any sound ethical reflection in the Christian sense dealing with the human person must be firmly grounded in this structure of existence.

From the incarnational approach, we cannot ignore insights derived from human endeavor and research, which assist us in illuminating and illustrating Christian truth. However, such insights do not become the primary criterion for Christian moral judgment. *Their use will have to be determined by Christian value.* For example, suppose it was shown that counselors having affairs with their clients do have salutary and healing effects, the Christian will not necessarily buy into this therapeutic method because such approach to therapy is against certain basic Christian values (not committing adultery or carrying on sexual promiscuity, or fidelity in marriage is at stake.)<sup>8</sup>

One fundamental presupposition for the proclamation of the gospel message is that something is basically wrong with existence, especially human existence as it is. The revelation of God in Christ confronts the human person as a fallen being. The human person is *in a state of sin*. Every condition does not necessarily express the Divine will and love of God. Existence is disrupted and in disorientation at its most basic foundation. Such words as sin, the fall, alienation from God, inauthentic existence and disobedience to God are an attempt to express this fundamental problem of human existence. The purpose for the proclamation of the gospel message is to make this known, and for the transformation of the human person in accordance to the Divine will. Anything therefore considered to be *natural* (that occurs in nature or is normal) does not then necessarily imply that such *natural* condition is fulfilling God's purpose or is in line with God's intention for human existence, except that the fundamental insights and the central themes from the self-disclosure of God in Christ make such an affirmation or imply it. *In other words, just because something is a certain way does not mean it ought to be that way.*<sup>9</sup> The critical question for the Christian is what light does the self-disclosure of God shed on this condition in light of the fundamental presupposition of the fallenness and alienation of human existence from its true source of life in which the human person finds authentic fulfillment, purpose and true freedom for which the human person was created?

## COMPONENTS OF THE INCARNATIONAL PARADIGM

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, Homosexuality: A symbolic Confusion (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

The incarnational paradigm is a method of theological reflection that deals with critical issues the church is confronted with in living her faith in the society, which model employs insights from the incarnation to illumine, clarify and articulate Christian perspective on given issues. (For one interested in a detailed presentation of the whole concept of this paradigm and the steps, see the author's book.<sup>10</sup>) *The operational principle is incarnational symbolism – the use of the familiar in each culture, which reflects some spiritual truth of the reality of God in Christ, to reflect on issues of faith.* The model has been developed to deal precisely with issues such as the present issue the church faces as she strives to be faithful.

There are four major components of the model in theological reflection. The first component or element is the *issue*. The issue is a theological problem. In the present case, *is homosexual marriage a valid Christian option?* It is very important that the issue be stated clearly in its essentials so that what is at stake is explicit. It is very helpful if the issue is stated in the form of question. The next major component is the *Scriptures*. It is through the Scriptures that the ultimate Christian authority is mediated to the church and brought to bear on the issue through the proper facet of the Scriptures. However, the use of the Scriptures is not limited to that facet of Scriptures. The third major component is the *cultural context* in which the issue arises. While the issue is a theological problem, the issue always arises in a cultural context.

The culture, from the incarnational perspective, is the expression of the creativity and freedom of human beings. And God uses the medium of culture to communicate the truth of the Word of God as attested in Scriptures. The culture is also the singular locus of

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<sup>10</sup> Jefferson S. Labala, *Through African Eyes: biblical parallel to African Religion and Culture and its implications for a new theological paradigm* (Astoria: Seaburn Publishing group, 2009), 97f.

God's activity in human society. As such, it helps to identify and provide the fourth element, interpretative key, to illuminating the truth of Scriptures for the issue in that context. The interpretative key is the *incarnational symbol*, and thus the existential lens, through which to illumine, understand and make sense of the truth of God's Word regarding the issue under consideration.

If the incarnation is indeed true, that God assumed human nature and entered the human community and took residence among us, then the incarnation touches all humanity. Our postulate is since humanity is assumed in the incarnation, every human community is in principle involved in the incarnation, and thus has a point of contact with the incarnation. The incarnation has a particularity dimension to it as well as a dimension of universality. Stated another way, "whatever is valid in Christ's disclosure of God is universally operative in human life, and therefore verifiable in human experience."<sup>11</sup> The incarnational symbol is the concrete form of what is valid in Christ's disclosure of God in that culture.

The incarnational symbol is something, an image, a concept or idea, a word or term, or story, which reflects some spiritual truth of the reality of God in Christ Jesus. The incarnational symbol pulls together the cultural reality represented by that symbol, and the spiritual truth, which it reflects in the Christian context. The incarnational symbol serves as a bridge between the culture and the truth of the Christian gospel concerning the issue, and thus assists in the elucidation of the theological truth in that context. The criteria for the selection of the incarnational symbol are *appropriateness, authenticity, and relevance*. Some incarnational symbols are limited in their illuminating

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<sup>11</sup> David Roberts, *Psychotherapy and Christian Views of Man* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1952), 142.

characteristics while others have wider appeal or illuminating characteristics. If the incarnation, as earlier stated, is the intersection of the absolute and the relative, the “universal and the particular,” and if the relative and particular is human, then we can expect to find the manifestation of that intersection wherever there is an expression of the absolute and the relative, the universal and the particular. The incarnational symbol is the concrete manifestation of such an intersection in the culture.

For every major issue the church confronts in living her faith in every culture, there is an *interpretative key* to illuminating and articulating a Christian perspective on the given issue. The incarnational symbol makes that possible. And the incarnational paradigm shows how to reflect on the issue using the incarnational symbol. *Our fundamental presupposition is God wants the church to be faithful in living the faith*, in this case, in dealing with critical issues that confront the church. The church cannot be faithful if there is no divine perspective in dealing with critical issues the church confronts in society; or, if God does not show the path that leads to faithfulness in the particular context, and thus the reign of God. And this is where the incarnational symbol comes in. When St. Paul, the apostle, was confronted with the idolatry of the Athenians, he used the statue to the “Unknown God” in Athens to articulate the truth of the Gospel to these people regarding their idolatry. Indeed, God is unknowable; but in Jesus Christ, this unknown God has been made known. Paul used this concept of the unknown God to connect and communicate with the Athenians. In West Africa, the church, depending on the issue, can employ the concept of the “eleventh sacrifice” among the Belleh to articulate the truth of Scriptures to these people in dealing with such issues. The “eleventh sacrifice” among the Belleh is the sacrifice made to end all sacrifice. This

concept reflects Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice of God who truly ends all sacrifice. For the Sawi people in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, the incarnational symbol is the “Peace Child.” In the Sawi culture there can be no peace without the “Peace Child.” Indeed, Jesus Christ as Prince of Peace is the “Peace Child.” There can be no peace between God and human beings without this “Peace Child.” Among the Mano people in Liberia, depending on the issue, the initiation rite, which speaks of death and resurrection, new birth, new identity can be used to present the truth of the Gospel regarding that issue.<sup>12</sup> In the Indian culture, *the Guru*, which in Indian culture means religious Teacher (“functioning as God to the disciple”), or the Hindu concept of *avatara* (Divine descent), can be utilized, depending on the issue, as the *interpretative key*, in presenting a Christian perspective on the given issue in that cultural context.<sup>13</sup> The Scriptures say God has not left God-self without witness in the world. If what the Scriptures say is true (which we hold to be), then the concept of incarnational symbolism, from the Christian perspective, points in the direction of such evidence, and thus, in the direction of the Divine perspective on issues in the culture.<sup>14</sup>

It is needless to say the same key that opens a door is the same key that locks it. It goes to say that the *interpretative key* is critical in this method of theological reflection. This key can truly illuminate or obscure the issue; it can distort or clarify the issue. This is why the criteria of appropriateness, authenticity, and relevance in the selection of the

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<sup>12</sup> Jefferson S. Labala, *Through African Eyes: biblical parallel to African Religion and Culture and its implications for a new theological paradigm* (Astoria: Seaburn Publishing group, 2009), 97f.

<sup>13</sup> M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru: an experiment in cross-cultural Christology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 48,50,52, 89f. It should be pointed out that while the specific focus of Thangaraj’s work is different from my work here, our general purpose is similar in some respects.

<sup>14</sup> For one interested in various incarnational symbols, the following books, published by Orbis Books are helpful – *Latin American Christologies* by Jose Miguez Bonino (ed), 1985; *Asian Faces of Jesus* by Sugirtharajah, 1993; *Faces of Jesus in Africa* by Robert J. Schreiter (ed), 1995.

*interpretative key* are so very important. Total reliance on the Lord for guidance, especially in the selection of the incarnational symbol cannot be overemphasized. It should be carefully noted that the incarnational symbol is *not an interpretation* of the Gospel; but rather, it is an *interpretative key*- a big difference. The key gives easy access to the kind of language needed in discussing the issue across cultures.<sup>15</sup>

It is this incarnational paradigm that will be employed in tackling the homosexual marriage issue in this cultural context. We will, however, employ an *incarnational symbol* that has universal appeal because the issue is affecting the church worldwide.

### SCRIPTURES AND INTERPRETATION

The ultimate authority for the Christian community is the God made known in Christ Jesus. The objective concrete sources to which we turn for this authority are the Scriptures. The way the Christian understands and interprets the Scriptures is all too important. The Christian community understands the Scriptures as the Word of God in some sense. As such they are revelation from God. As revelation, the Scriptures mediate the very presence of God. *The Scriptures serve as the source of what Christians ought to believe and teach, and the standard of what is true Christian doctrine or belief. The Scriptures are in this sense the canon.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> It needs to be said that Karl Barth had vigorously repudiated the role of culture in theology, and asserted the unabridgeable gulf between God and human being, and thus in some respect, attacked the theological position similar to ours. However, Barth later on introduced the “idea of the ‘humanity’ of God” in his work. In a sense, our work appropriates this concept in the incarnation, i.e. the incarnate God, to assert the bridging of this gulf by the incarnation, and thus a place for culture in theology.

<sup>16</sup> We are aware that other Christians may give different sources of authority such as the Christian community. From the historical perspective, God’s self-disclosure in Christ gave rise to the Christian community, and the Christian community gave rise to the text. The movement here was from the authority to the living context or community, and then to the text and back to the Authority to complete the circle. The present movement in our time is from the authority to the text and the living context and back to the authority. Once the text was established, the text now has authority over the living context. The formal place of the original recipients of God’s self-disclosure has now been superseded by the text because the text has become objective in a way the living context is not. In other words, God first used the original recipients of the Divine revelation to create the text. Now God uses the text, especially through proclamation to create a community of the people of God. In this, the text now takes formal priority in the

All Christians view the Bible as authoritative in some sense but not necessarily in the same way. For some Christians, anything is scriptural (enjoined upon the Christian and thus canonical) by virtue of being in the Bible. Such view of the Bible as Scriptures (revelation and canon) in theological reflection will not stand close scrutiny. There are many things, including instructions in the Bible that many Christians would not follow because they do not think it is the Christian way to act. For example, no Christian insists on killing those who commit adultery, or paying back evil for evil, or abstaining from meat that has been strangled, or not eating blood of animals (Deuteronomy 22:22; I Corinthians 15:29; Exodus 21: 23-25; Acts 15:20). All these are in the Bible. However, there are things including instructions in the Bible that are clearly what Christians ought to follow, because they know it is the Christian way to act. For example, Christians are to love others, they are not to steal or bear false witness, and they are not to have idols (John 14: 34-35; Exodus 20:4, 15-16). There are beliefs and practices in the Old Testament that were continued with the coming of Christ Jesus. There were other beliefs and practices that were not continued. There are beliefs and practices even in the New Testament that continue to this day while there are clearly some beliefs and practices we Christians today no longer follow. The examples just given make this clear. They are from the Old Testament as well as from the New Testament. Let us mention another illustration of the latter to dwell on later—that of casting lots in Acts 1:15f in finding Judas’ replacement. Clearly then, there are some things in the Bible that are not Christian practice while there are some other things that definitely, Christians ought to follow if they consider themselves Christian in any meaningful sense of the word. The point is it is not enough to

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hermeneutical circle. Another way of saying this is originally, the community of faith was both the text and the living context before the text was created.

say it is in the Bible therefore this is a Christian position. This is how, not too long ago, as earlier stated, some Christians justified slavery. How therefore does one approach scriptural interpretation as a Christian in deciding how one makes such a distinction, i.e. what ought to be continued, what is permanent and what is changing, what is Christian understanding and what is not, what is absolute and what is relative? This then raises the question of the *method of scriptural interpretation and application for the Christian*.

Our approach is the incarnational paradigm earlier set forth. The incarnational paradigm indicates that the particular expression of deity in Jesus the Christ is conveyed through his humanity, for he is the incarnate God as well as the Living Word. There is therefore a human element. Thus, the particular expression of deity in Jesus Christ indicates the divine and the human, the absolute and the relative, the permanent and the changing aspect, the universal and the particular.

Relating this paradigm to the Scriptures as the *Word of God* (for Jesus Christ is the living *Word of God* even as the Scriptures are the written *Word of God*), there is the divine element as well as the human element, the absolute and the relative, the permanent and the changing aspect of Scriptures.<sup>17</sup> Some things are permanent while others are not; some things continue while others are discontinued. Just as God, in revealing God-self through Jesus Christ, did that through human element (Jesus' humanity), so also God conveys the Word of God in the Bible through human element (human culture). One implication of the nature and character of divine revelation in the Christian sense is that some truths are expressed in relative terms while others are in absolute terms; some are culturally conditioned while others are not.

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<sup>17</sup> See the Appendix B for further treatment, or my book *Through African Eyes* (Astoria, NY: Seaburn Publishing Group, 2009), 98f.

How do we determine what are permanent, continuing aspects of the Scriptures and which are not; which truths are for all time and which truths are not? *Those truths or insights fundamentally linked to God disclosed in the incarnation (Jesus Christ) are the permanent, continuing aspects of the Scriptures.* From the incarnational point of view, Scriptural passages are generally particular expressions of certain spiritual or theological truths linked to God disclosed in Christ Jesus. To be sure, some statements are expressions of fundamental spiritual truths – Do all things to the glory of God; God is one. Love all people. However, for the most part, passages of Scriptures (and even stories, events, history, poetry) are *particular expressions* of some basic spiritual truths or insights profitable for the life of the believer. The particular expressions are usually organically related to, and conveyed through, the culture, thus the relative aspect of Scriptures. The proper interpretation of Scriptures for the Christian therefore requires uncovering the spiritual truth or principle that is given particular expression in the text. Phrased differently, valid Christian interpretation of the Scriptures requires bringing to light the theological truth, which underlies the particular expression of the passage. *If such insight is reflective of the nature and character of God made known in Christ Jesus, it is normative for the Christian.* Such truth is always expressed through some culture, thus part of the difficulty. This requires prayerful study of the Scriptures, proper method of scriptural interpretation, and reliance on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. *The point is any adequate principle of scriptural interpretation consistent with the purpose and character of Scriptures must come to terms with the God dimension (spiritual aspect) as well as the human dimension (cultural aspect) of the Bible as the Word of God from the incarnational perspective.*

Let us give specific examples illustrative of this approach to scriptural interpretation. First, an example of what not to continue: Take the passage in Acts 1:15-26 where the disciples of Christ Jesus after his death and resurrection, cast lots to find Judas' replacement. Now, are we to understand this passage to be teaching us, followers of Christ, to cast lots to find persons and place them in position in ministry, or how to select persons for ministry in the church? Well, we are following the examples of the Apostles, one may argue. Such an understanding would be a gross misinterpretation of the passage. However, this is how many Christians interpret the Scriptures quite often. Once it is in the Bible, it is also applicable to the Christian for all time for some believers. How would this passage be interpreted and evaluated according to the paradigm just described? The question to ask would be: What is the theological or spiritual truth given expression by the passage, in particular, the casting of lots to find Judas' replacement? After employing a valid method of scriptural interpretation and arriving at the meaning of the text, one needs ask the cardinal question: *Is this meaning (truth) reflective of the nature and character of God revealed in Christ Jesus?*

What are the disciples doing by their action? Notice that the text clearly indicates that the Apostles prayed, seeking guidance about God's choice and then cast lots as a *particular expression of seeking such a choice as the replacement of Judas.*

Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles (Acts 1:24-26).

Let us assume for our purposes that the spiritual or theological truth, which underlies the text, or is given specific expression by casting lots, is stated thus:

1. The believer is to seek to do God's will in ministry.
2. The believer is to seek God's guidance in all of one's undertaking, especially in ministry.
3. The believer is to rely on the Lord in all of one's ministry endeavors.

We then need to ask: Is this insight linked fundamentally to God revealed in Jesus. *Is this insight reflective of the nature and character of God?* In other words, does God want us to do God's *will* in ministry? It is abundantly clear from Jesus' ministry that he was doing God's *will*. He sought to do the *will* of God. He relied on God all the time and sought God's guidance in his ministry. As Jesus' disciples, we too are to do God's *will* in ministry and rely on God as exemplified by the disciples here in this text. The passage is not therefore teaching believers to cast lots in finding out God's will, or what God would have the believer do in a particular situation of ministry. Casting lots is the relative, particular and cultural element of this Scripture, and thus relates to the changing, human element not binding on the believers of today. It may have been used then, but may not be the Christian practice or appropriate today in our situation. *Some of yesterday's wisdom is today's folly*. The spiritual or theological truth of the Scriptures in this text is authoritative for the Christian for all time, but not the relative, changing aspect. Stated another way, the specific way the Christian relies on God may differ from situation to situation, from time to time, from place to place. But the truth or teaching *to rely on God (or do the will of God) is valid for all time and in every situation*. Not being cognizant of the relative and changing aspect of Scriptures can sometimes wreck havoc on the truth of Scriptures and do great harm and lead believers astray. Citing a different kind of example other than the previous one, this is how some church authorities in earlier times

prohibited, and even persecuted other Christians for translating the Bible in the vernacular of the people. One presupposition for this prohibition was that the original language in which the Bible had been written was in some sense a permanent aspect of the Bible, thus to use a different language was at best to distort the Word of God, especially so if such translation had not been approved by the church. The proper understanding of the incarnation is important for adequate principles of scriptural interpretation as well as the application of the Scriptures in this paradigm.<sup>18</sup>

It does not follow from what has been said regarding the relative and changing aspect of the Scriptures that it is not necessary or an essential part of the Word of God. It is an essential aspect of the Scriptures as the Word of God! For without this relative, changing aspect of the Word of God in the Christian sense, the Word of God cannot become the incarnated Word, which incarnation in the primary sense is the precondition for the Christian faith in human history. And without the incarnation in the secondary sense, the Word of God cannot become relevant and engaging.

Ultimately, God has to take on human nature to become the Christ, i.e., the God-man. In the existential sense, the Word of God has to be conveyed to a people using their language, i.e. their culture, to truly become the incarnated Word. The incarnation of the Word of God thus makes the Word of God capable of being understood and relevant in every age, every culture, by employing that which is organically rooted in the culture of a people, in the interpretation and conveying of the Word of God in that culture.

The incarnated Word becomes the “living Word” which engages, challenges, and transforms. Of course, it is the Holy Spirit who does all of this through the “living Word”

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<sup>18</sup> For more on this method of interpretation see the author’s book, *Through African Eyes* (Astoria, NY: Seaburn Publishing Group, 2008), 112f.

as the Spirit of God carries on the work of redemption; for the Holy Spirit is indeed the Spirit of the Living Word. The use made of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit to carry on the work of salvation confirms this truth. The Bible as Scriptures is written, utilizing the culture of the people to whom the Word of God was proclaimed. *In other words, the authentic gospel message is always an incarnated Word, given form by the particular culture in which the Gospel is proclaimed.* And the relative, changing aspect of the Word of God makes that possible. And, if the incarnated Word, the process of the incarnation utilizes the culture of the people to whom the Gospel is proclaimed for the incarnation of the Word of God. Therefore, this relative and changing aspect makes the Word of God timely, relevant and engaging in every culture, and in every age! It goes to say how one understands and interprets the relative and changing dimension of Scriptures in the interpretative process makes a tremendous difference between truth, fidelity and authenticity on the one hand, and distortion, legalism and irrelevance of Scriptures on the other.

Now, an example of what to continue: Let us take the Ten Commandments found in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:1-7; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). Some Christians assert that in this age of grace, Christians are not bound by the teachings of the Decalogue. These Ten Commandments are no longer relevant to the Christian under grace. Others, however, maintain that the Ten Commandments are relevant and normative for the Christian. How does our approach relate here? How does our method illumine the issue? What is the theological truth, or spiritual insight given expression by these Ten Commandments, we ask. A careful study of the Decalogue indicates that the first four deal with the believer's relationship to God (e.g. You shall have no other gods before me,

make no idols, do not take name of God in vain) while the remaining six deal with the believer's relationship with other human beings (e.g. honor your father and mother, do not steal, or bear false witness or kill). Jesus summarized the Decalogue as love for God and love for our fellow human beings. And to speak of love is to speak of a kind of relationship with others. Thus, these Ten Commandments deal with the believer's love relationship to God and towards others. These Commandments express the right kind of relationship the believer ought to have toward God and one's fellow human beings, and it is the relationship of love. *Is this insight reflective of the nature and character of God?* Indeed, God by nature is love. Thus this insight is reflective of the very nature of God! Therefore, this insight is linked fundamentally to the God revealed in Christ Jesus: God is love, and thus the related God.

Can the believer truly love God and worship another god besides the Almighty God, or take the Lord's name in vain, or have idols? If we truly love someone, will we kill the person, steal from the person or bear false witness against the person? The answer, it seems, is obviously *no*. It follows that in this case, even the particular expressions of the theological truth are inextricably tied to this truth. One cannot fulfill or carry out this spiritual or theological truth that underlies the Decalogue and ignore the particular expressions of the Decalogue. In the previous situation, the believer today could rely on God or seek God's guidance without casting lot. Therefore, the theological truth which underlies the Ten Commandments and even the particular expressions as the Ten Commandments hold true for Christians for all time. The Ten Commandments may be viewed as concrete expressions of the obligation of our love relationship to God and our fellow human beings in the Christian context. Even explicit obligations, as lovers

know so well, do not exhaust the demand of love. So the Decalogue does not exhaust the demand of the obligation or expression of love. Let us state this insight in a different way. If we obey the Ten Commandments out of obligation, we are not living by grace; hence, we are not demonstrating genuine Christian love, because love is not compelled. However, we cannot contravene these laws in our daily life, and say we are demonstrating love. Therefore, the Ten Commandments are instructions for the believer in every age in the Christian sense.<sup>19</sup> They are permanent, continuing aspect of Scriptures.

In a way, the Scriptures may be compared to a manual accompanying the “human product,” written upon the instruction and guidance of the “manufacturer” of the human product, in this case, the Almighty God, by other individuals. To be sure the Bible is far more than a manual--it is the Word of God. In our analogy this “manual” is unique. Instead of a step-by-step approach to issues and possible problems with this product, the manufacturer had decided to have this “manual” written in the form of stories of operation and issues encountered during the use of this human product by various “customers” who themselves are products.

In these stories by previous “users,” however, are instructions of the manufacturer regarding operation and whatever problems may go wrong with this product. Some are success stories while others are dismal failures and human wreckage. One has to read these stories very attentively and carefully to hear what the manufacturer has to say about one’s particular situation through these stories. The manufacturer had clearly stated to call first when using this manual in order to guide the user. In fact, there

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed analysis and treatment of the subject, see the author’s book, *The Battle Over the Ten Commandments: challenging the witness of Christian in society* (Astoria, NY: Seaburn Publishing Group, 2009), 19-24.

is a hotline just for that. The manual contains stories of tragedy and other serious errors by customers who completely ignored to call before using this manual. There are also stories of happy customers who took advantage of the hotline and followed the insights (spiritual truths) and applied them properly.

In this manual are written in bold letters certain fundamental truths, warnings, caution, and dos and don'ts. They are so important that they appear on just about every other page of the manual: **You are not here by accident or chance! There is a creator! There is a purpose to your life! Ignore the creator at your peril! Sin carries with it tragic consequences! No idols! Trust God in every situation! Human beings are all one! Love your fellow human beings! No divination!** And more.

How then do we make proper use of the manual so characterized? As already indicated by the examples given, we cannot always directly apply the solutions of other "customers' problems to ours." We need to read their stories prayerfully and discover the insights that apply to our particular situation with the help of the manufacturer. This requires learning how to discover the insights in these personal stories. And much more important is intimate personal relationship with, and knowledge of, the manufacturer, how to hear the manufacturer through this manual, and how to get the help of the manufacturer!

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THIS APPROACH TO SCRIPTURES

What are some implications of this approach to the Scriptures for the Christian life of faith and issues faced by the church in society? We will mention some of them at this time.

1. Human life in community is the interplay of the social, moral, and spiritual reality of existence, always guided by the Holy Spirit for the Christian who is living the fullness of life in Christ. We have moral obligations to our fellow human beings, social responsibilities to carry out, and spiritual needs to fulfill for our God-connectedness. Because of the ambiguity of life, and the nature and character of Scriptures, the guidance of the Lord is of necessity in order for the believer to properly apply Scriptures in navigating the various spheres and fulfill the obligations, responsibilities, and needs in these spheres of life.

2. Human beings need something, be it social institutions, or structures or objects that convey the ontological–existential reality of existence. For some, the ontological–existential is manifested as the immaterial and the material, sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the physical, the mystical and the ordinary, or the ideological and the concrete. Such things are properly called *symbols*. Some common symbols are religious institutions; others are flags. Theology deals with symbols, and thus the Scriptures. They deal with ultimate reality as well as the relative, the divine as well as the human. Some symbols in the Christian context are “Jesus Christ, the church and the sacraments.” To be sure, they are symbols, each of a different order.<sup>20</sup>

Human society cannot do without symbols; human beings are symbol-using creatures.<sup>21</sup> Language is one of the most significant means of creating the symbols we use. Indeed, symbols are in the realm of communication. Language is one link between reality and human beings. Symbols create social reality and order our life. Symbols, in

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<sup>20</sup> Marianne Sawicki, *The Gospel in History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) , 12

<sup>21</sup> Joseph R. Gusfield (ed.), *On Symbols and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) , 112f.

this sense, not only create social reality, but also convey certain reality to the community, and how we order our life in human society.

3. The true and authentic gospel message is always an incarnational message, given form, so to speak, by the particular cultural context in which the gospel is communicated; for, as the Gospel of John asserts, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Word cannot truly take on flesh while ignoring the very culture in which this enfleshment is taking place, because the culture is integral to the enfleshment process. Again, we see this clearly in the Jewish cultural context in which the message was first received and propagated. One of the fundamental insights of the incarnation is that the gospel message is always conveyed through a cultural garb. The very literary structure, thought forms, and worldview of the Bible, along with other cultural elements utilized in composing the Scriptures, and in conveying the revelation of God attest to this incarnational insight, thus the relative aspect of the Scriptures as the Word of God.<sup>22</sup>

4. The recognition of the permanent and changing aspects of Scriptures, the absolute and relative, the spiritual and the social dimension of Scriptures requires that in order to apply the truth of Scriptures, the Christian should first endeavor to bring to light the basic spiritual insight or truth being conveyed by the text. This implies that there are universal spiritual truths of Scriptures applicable in all cultures and in every age, while there are rules, and insights and actions only applicable in certain cultural context, for a particular time, place and circumstances. It follows that just because something is stated in Scriptures, it does not mean it holds true for all time and place. The critical question is

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed presentation, and how both Conservatives and Liberals misunderstand and misapply the principle of the incarnation to the interpretation of the Scriptures, see the author’s book, *Through African Eyes* (Astoria, NY: Seaburn Publishing Group, 2008), 23f.

this: *Is the basic insight conveyed through the text linked fundamentally to the God disclosed in Christ Jesus, and is it reflective of the nature and character of this God?*

5. There are concrete and appropriate structures or forms for the expression of the loving and gracious will of God. The form/structure provides the appropriate means by which the Divine will is expressed. The form though distinct, is inseparable from what is being expressed. **You do not ill-treat one you claim you love and say you are expressing love. Such treatment is a negation of your claim, the very idea of love. Phrased differently, the love of God cannot be expressed outside the will of God.** The structures or form must be appropriate for the expression of the particular will of God. *Creation, human being as male and female, the family and marriage, and the church are examples of formal structures for the expression of the Divine will. These structures order our life in certain ways rather than another.*

Just because the father loves his children, it does not follow that the father can morally express his love for his daughter or son through sexual intimacy; even though, this is one way he expresses his love to his wife. Such manner of expression of love for his children would be a total disregard for the marriage and family structure, and a serious and gross violation of the family, and God's order of creation of which marriage is an integral part. While the father ought to love his children, there are appropriate ways to express such love for one's children. The use of the formal structures for the expression of the Divine will in the Christian sense should always be informed and normed by the revelation of God in Christ because:

- It is that revelation which gives the Christian faith its distinctive character.

- That revelation discloses the world as a fallen world. Therefore, anything that is in it is not necessarily in accordance with the Divine will, hence, the need for the revelation of God in Christ to inform and norm the Christian use of these structures. And the Scriptures are the objective sources for this revelation in the church. If it is the Divine will for sexual intimacy and the sexual expression of love, there must be appropriate structures, context and means of doing that. Stated another way, if it is the will of God for human beings to get married, there ought to be the appropriate structure or form for expressing this will of God in society.

6. The authentic Christian life cannot and should not be lived on the level of natural instincts and impulses, which link the human person to the lower forms of life. There is a higher Divine purpose to human life, which Divine purpose should subjugate these natural impulses. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to do that as the believer submits to the indwelling Holy Spirit to take control of one's life. The authentic Christian life is the life lived to the glory of God, and thus in light of the spiritual truth of Scriptures and guided by the Holy Spirit, which guidance is validated by the spiritual truth of Scriptures.

7. Finally, in light of the permanent and relative, changing aspects of Scriptures, it is not enough for the present issue or for that matter, any issue, to simply quote biblical texts in support of a certain position. We have to identify and articulate some fundamental revelatory insight or truth from Scriptures in light of which to evaluate the practice or position, in this case, homosexual marriage as a valid Christian option or not. Phrased differently, the formal structure of marriage should be linked fundamentally to

the God revealed in Christ Jesus; that is, the normative structure of marriage should be grounded in, and reflective of, the nature and character of God revealed in Christ Jesus. Homosexual marriage will then be evaluated in light of this marriage structure in order to consider it as a valid Christian option or not.

This is what we intend to do, namely, show that the normative structure of marriage (if there is one) is grounded in, and reflective of, the nature and character of the God revealed in Christ Jesus. This structure will then serve as a basis of evaluating homosexual marriage. Before then, let us consider some of the major theological arguments given in support of homosexual marriage as the background of the conception of Christian marriage to be articulated. We take up this part of our reflection in the next chapter.

## WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

There are a number of arguments now being put forth in support of homosexual marriage. We are going to summarize these arguments in this chapter. The summary will primarily be focused on the biblical and theological arguments. In the end, we will articulate what we consider the basic weakness of all these arguments from a theological perspective as the backdrop to the conception of marriage to be set forth in this book.

## THE REVISIONIST ARGUMENT

This argument is in essence a *reinterpretation of the Scriptures*, or the long held traditional understanding of the church regarding what the Scriptures have to say about

homosexuality. Succinctly stated, *the argument is that the Scriptures properly understood, nowhere explicitly condemn homosexuality. Those persons who read the Scriptures and find such condemnation of homosexuality misunderstand the Scriptures or read into the Scriptures their own preconceived ideas or bias.* Passages such as Genesis 18:20-22; Genesis 19:1-25; Judges 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; I Timothy 1:10; Romans 1:26-27; and I Corinthians 6:9-11 *traditionally interpreted as prohibiting homosexual relationship are given new interpretation congenial to homosexuals.* In the Genesis account of creation where God creates human being as male and female, one for the other, the revisionist interpretation is that the passage in question (Genesis 2:22-25) does not establish the institution of marriage. If it does, heterosexual marriage is not stated as the norm. This passage is descriptive of the human reality and not normative for marriage for all time, the proponents of this argument would assert.

The apparent condemnation of homosexual behavior ought to be understood in light of the Holiness Code of Israel, which Christians no longer follow. Prohibition against homosexual behavior in this context for our time would be resorting to legalism which would include many practices such as "eating rare steak, wearing mixed fabrics and having marital intercourse during the menstrual period."<sup>23</sup> *Homosexual conduct is thus condemned because it violates "Cultic Sexual Code,"*<sup>24</sup> according to the proponents of the revisionist argument.

The major point of the argument of the revisionist position seems to be that prohibition against homosexual marriage for our time should be grounded on a solid theological foundation, some ontological basis to carry weight. The thrust of such argument seems reasonable because it was not so long ago when the Scriptures were being used in a superficial way to justify slavery. Many Christians use the Scriptures

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<sup>23</sup> Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkot, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View* (San Francisco: harper & Row, 1978), 59-61.

<sup>24</sup> Paul A. Mickley, *Of Sacred Worth* (Abingdon Press, 1991), 58.

today to prohibit the ordination of women. Just because the Scriptures assert a position does not make it normative for all time, the proponents of homosexual marriage would conclude.

We are in full agreement with this last statement. Some assertions of the Scriptures cannot be considered normative for our time, for example, the decision made at the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49 which required Christians to abstain from meat that has been strangled, or from blood,<sup>25</sup> or the refusal to accept female into the preaching ministry based on a certain reading of the Scriptures. But is it true that there is no normative structure of marriage to be found in the Scriptures to serve as a guide in our time by which to evaluate homosexual marriage as acceptable or not? Let us raise some questions to be dealt with later. *Is there an ultimate structure of existence reflected in the creation of human being as male and female? If there is, what is the relation between this ontological structure of existence and the structure of marriage?* Such issues seem to be the missing link regarding the discussion of homosexual relationship, especially as it pertains to marriage.

#### THE ENLIGHTENED ARGUMENT

This argument admits that *the Scriptures do condemn homosexual practices*. But while the Scriptures do condemn homosexual practices, our present day understanding of the subject matter of homosexuality is markedly different from that of the people when the Scriptures were written. In our day, we know the distinction between orientation and behavior. If those people who wrote the Scriptures knew what we now know about the subject matter, they would have a different attitude towards homosexuals, as we today have about slavery in the church. According to this enlightened argument, we today stand at a vantage point in our assessment of the homosexual condition. In support of

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<sup>25</sup> Acts 15:27-29.

this argument, it is said that all the biblical writers ever talk about is sexual practices and not sexual orientation.<sup>26</sup> This seems to be the case.

*This position attempts to take seriously the distinction between orientation or the condition of homosexuality and the sexual practice of the person with such a condition. The same distinction can be made for the heterosexual person whose orientation is one thing (right) while the sexual practice is another, e.g. rape, incest, and sexual exploitation. Persons who use this argument would say that while homosexual practice may be morally wrong, there is no biblical justification to condemn the homosexual person just because of one's orientation. This argument, carried to its logical conclusion, may seem to forbid homosexual marriage, but would render no negative moral judgment on the orientation as such. It is not, however, clear from the persons who use this argument that this conclusion is drawn. The conclusion that seems to be implied by proponents of this argument is that our understanding of the concept of orientation certainly adds a different dimension to the discussion and therefore requires a different conclusion about the sexual practice of the homosexual: We should be more tolerant and understanding and not be legalistic. Morality, not even sexual morality, should be legislated.*

It is certainly true that the distinction between orientation of the homosexual and the sexual conduct of such a person must be made, and it does add a new dimension to the discussion. Granted the reasonableness of this distinction, it may still be inquired, how should the church characterize the condition of homosexuality? Is the homosexual orientation an expression of the Divine will for the homosexual as in the case of the heterosexual person? Or is it morally neutral or evil? Is it really true that sexual morality should not be legislated? Should we have no laws about incest? Does the distinction made between orientation and practice have no bearing on homosexual practice, in this

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<sup>26</sup> UMC, Report of the Committee to Study Homosexuality to the General Council on Ministries of the UMC (General Council on Ministries, 1992), 8.

case, homosexual marriage? One's response to these questions will definitely have bearing on the issue of homosexual marriage.

## THE NATURAL ARGUMENT

There are two or three versions of this argument. *At the heart of each of these is the conviction or truth claim that homosexuality is a matter of genetic make-up, and thus natural by implication, meaning, it is normal for these persons. Since the condition is natural, it should be accepted.* By logical extension, the corresponding sexual practice of the homosexual should also be accepted as an alternative way of life, which means the acceptance of homosexual marriage. Some even compare homosexuality as being analogous to left-handedness.

An interesting phenomenon about this natural argument is that there are as many evidences in support of it as there are against it.<sup>27</sup> After four years of extensive work, here is the conclusion of the committee set up by the **United Methodist Church** to study the issue of homosexuality, which has direct bearing on this natural argument.

### CONCLUSION OF THE COMMITTEE SET UP BY THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (1992)

Though there is no definitive answer to the question of causation, some helpful information is available. Most authorities suggest that the causes are probably complex and difficult to determine. There is also considerable agreement that it is a mistake to treat physiological and social/ psychological factors as totally distinct from each other. There has been a long-standing debate between those who seek physical causes ("nature") and those who look for causes in the social or psychological environment ("nurture"). Increasingly this "nature" vs. "nurture"

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<sup>27</sup> Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Christians: a citizen's guide to faith and politics* (Ventura, California: Regal, 2008), 89-90.

dichotomy is seen by sophisticated students of sexual orientation to be a false one. That appears to be a misplaced debate.

Current research includes studies in genetics, pre-natal influences, brain differences, hormonal levels, other biological factors, and psychological, social, and cultural influences. None of these avenues of investigation has yielded conclusive, replicable results, though some may show more promise than others. No one theory of the origin and nature of homosexuality is persuasive enough to command a consensus among reputable scientists. However, the evidence before the Committee strongly indicated that sexual orientation, however determined, is established early, and that change, when possible, is difficult.<sup>28</sup>

*In short the scientific community points to multiple and complex factors regarding the causation of homosexuality.* As the conclusion of this committee's report indicates, the dichotomy between "nature" and "nurture" may be misleading. A talk show host who was hosting identical twins on his show got his first lesson in this misleading debate about "nature" versus "nurture." On this show was a set of identical twins; one was heterosexual but the other was homosexual. Upon learning this he blurted out to his own embarrassment: "I thought it was said that homosexuality is due to genetic make-up. How come here . . ." He cut short his comments and there was deafening silence.

The bits and pieces of evidence from the scientific community seem to suggest that there are complex factors, which go into the development of one's sexual orientation which would call into question the adequacy of the natural argument.<sup>29</sup> The natural argument is, however, a formidable argument if all the evidences point in the same direction. The critical issue here would be the legitimate interpretation of these evidences in light of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>28</sup> UMC, Report of the Committee to Study Homosexuality to the General Council on Ministries of the UMC (General Council on Ministries, 1992), 18; cf. Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Christians: a citizen's guide to faith and politics* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible And Homosexual Practice: texts and hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 395-419. Some factors linked to the cause of homosexual orientation include lack of suitable role models, the kind of parent-child relationship developed from infancy, and "the conditioning effects of first sexual experience." H. Kimball Jones, *Toward a Christian Understanding of Homosexual* (New York: Association Press, 1966), 37-49. See also John f. Harvey, OSFS, *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 27-51.

*The point is the genetic basis of a condition is not the adequate basis for establishing the morality of the condition; although, it certainly has a role. Society must still make a moral judgment regarding the behavior genetics promotes in community. Take the condition of kleptomania, a disease or disorder that causes individuals to steal, not because of any need; it has a genetic component. Or, take pedophilia, an uncharacteristic sexual interest in children leading to sexual abuse. Suppose these conditions were shown to have entirely genetic basis? Would such finding render them anymore morally acceptable? Those who seek to justify homosexual marriage by means of genetics need to do far more, because genetics alone does not establish morality; hence, homosexual marriage as morally acceptable cannot be so established.*

#### THE SYMPATHETIC OR FALLEN STATE ARGUMENT

This argument admits that homosexual orientation is a genetic problem but about which the person with this orientation or society can do nothing to reverse the orientation. This being the case and since we are sexual beings, the homosexuals should be allowed to express this orientation in an affirming, loving, committed relationship, especially so in marriage. We should remember that the world is in a fallen state and we cannot reflect perfectly God's divine purpose, but should make the best use of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. For the homosexuals this means homosexual marriages.

Many homosexuals do admit that even if they wanted to change, they would be unable. Besides, there have been few successes reported in the attempt in clinical work to reverse homosexual orientation.<sup>30</sup> If, indeed, sexuality is integral to the being that is human, how can we deal with homosexual orientation with Christian integrity, especially

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<sup>30</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible And Homosexual Practices: texts and hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 420- 429.

Mario, Bergner, *Setting Love in Order: hope and healing for homosexual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1995) Marc Oraison, a priest, doctor and psychiatrist who has worked with homosexuals for more than twenty years, has been among the persons who report success with reversing the homosexual orientation in some persons. See Marc Oraison, *The Homosexual Question* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 16-37

so as it relates to the expression of this orientation in a legitimate Christian way? This is a difficult question and this argument is a forceful one indeed.

### THE LOVE ARGUMENT

This argument, usually asserted by female scholars but in no way limited to them, stresses the quality of the relationship and not the form. Simply put, the argument is what matters in marriage is love and not essentially whether or not the persons involved are male and female. These persons point to dehumanizing heterosexual marriages and the havoc some have caused women. *In this argument, what makes a marriage is the quality of the relationship. Once two persons really love each other and want to spend their lives together in a committed, affirming relationship, it is the proper thing to do. No one should put a stumbling block in their way just because they are of the same sex.*<sup>31</sup>

The majority report of the **Committee on Human Sexuality of the Presbyterian Church (USA)** takes a similar position, even though it widens its theological base. It speaks about a sexual ethic of "justice-love."

POSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
(UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. 1991)

The position of the committee on Human Sexuality of the Presbyterian Church (USA) means:

- a. Honoring the goodness of sexuality. At the very least, doing justice to one another as sexual beings requires honoring and celebrating - with thanksgiving to God - the goodness of our bodies; the wonder of our capacity to give as well as to receive pleasure and comfort; and the power of intimacy relations to build mutual respect and well-being.
- b. Gratitude for diversity. Sexual justice calls us to acknowledge and respect the diversity of age, gender, sexual orientation, color, body size and shape, families, and custom. Such diversity enriches rather than diminishes our life together. Justice requires us to promote such diversity. It questions elitist cultural assumptions and stereotypes. We are invited to move beyond mere toleration of differences and celebrate such variety as a great good.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Glenn T. Stanton and Bill Maier, *Marriage on Trial: the case against Same-Sex marriage and parenting* (Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 8f.

This report calls for a new "paradigm" to

define appropriate sexual norms and expectations, . . . a new order of righteousness, a different pattern of sexual and social relations which will do away with stereotype and include diversity.<sup>33</sup>

Justice to the gays and lesbians means celebrating with them their life-style and allowing them presumably to get married (homosexual wedding).<sup>34</sup>

This fifth argument forces the church to rethink its position on the undue emphasis on the form of the expression of sexual love in relation to the content of that form of expression in the context of marriage. One of the critical issues raised by this argument is this: Can love be expressed in just anyway? Is the form of the expression of love critical to defining love itself? This issue spills over into other areas such as mercy killing (euthanasia) but let us restrict it to the subject on hand. Would the church allow a woman or man to get married to his adult offspring just because they have genuine romantic love for each other? Or, would it be Christian for a brother and sister to get married to each other because they sincerely love each other romantically and want to spend their lives together as husband and wife? What Christian norm would inform such decisions? Simply genuine love as the norm? These instances are examples of some of the issues to be considered in the new paradigm of sexual relations that are being called for by this argument. What about the issue of incest as it relates to the sexual expression of love? This love argument, as compelling as it is, raises more questions in relating as sexual beings.

#### JUSTICE – EQUALITY ARGUMENT

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<sup>32</sup>Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbyterians and Human Sexuality 1991 (Louisville, Kentucky), 9-10.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> Glenn T. Stanton and Bill Maier, Marriage on Trial: the case against Same-Sex marriage and parenting (Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 21-22

We have decided to treat the justice and equality arguments as one. While there is some distinction they are essentially the same argument, or the aim of both arguments is the same. The Justice-Equality argument goes something like this. Since society allows a man to get married to a woman, it should allow a person to get married to another of the same gender since on the basis of equality, the male and female are equal. Justice and equality then means what is allowed or permissible between the different genders should be permissible among the same sex or gender. Not allowing a male or female to marry to one of the same gender is unfair, and thus unjust, especially so when they are truly in love with each other and want to spend their lives together. Society or the church should not stand in the way and trample upon the rights of the persons involved.

On the face of it, this seems to be a compelling argument- to a point, and is now very prominent among Christian advocates. We will use this last argument to address and point out the fundamental weakness of all the six arguments. Let us ask: Is society trampling upon the rights of persons who are truly in love by passing incest laws? Is the church violating the concept of justice by proscribing polygamy as the norm for Christian marriage? Are the proponents of this argument in the United States ready to advocate for incest and polygamy? If a man truly falls in love with his sister or mother in the romantic sense, is it unjust for the society or the church to stand in the way of their marriage? As compelling as their argument is, it has serious flaws.

While it is the case that gender has long been used unfairly and unjustly in many societies to mistreat people, especially the female gender, to cast the homosexual marriage issue as essentially one of justice and equality is to mischaracterize the debate and minimize the theological nature of it, and the profound spiritual issue and morality

involved and their ramifications. This is not to say justice and equality are not theological issues; rather, it is to say the way they are being used here in support of homosexual marriage by Christians is misleading and theologically unsound. Such usage does not ground justice and equality in the Divine will or in some sound ethical method of reflection in the Christian sense.

It is here that the error arises in all of these arguments. And this is the basic issue at stake in all of them – are they grounded in the Divine will? Only if it can be shown that homosexual marriage is integral to the will of God can we meaningfully discuss justice and equality in the Christian sense, i.e. not allowing homosexual marriage raises the issue of justice and equality. Let us illustrate. A man has sexual intimacy with his adult daughter. He then says for the sake of fairness and equal treatment, he will carry out the same act with the second adult daughter. Before he does that, he is exposed and apprehended on the basis of incest law. Does it make any sense to say, in order to be fair to both daughters and thus equal treatment, the father should be permitted to carry out the second act, even if the second daughter consents to such act? Can one properly discuss fairness, individual rights, and equal treatment in the father's intent if the act to be carried out is not morally right or justifiable? In the Christian theological context, is the act in question in accordance with the Divine will? **As Christians, we cannot talk about fairness, love, equality and justice outside the will of God.** Of course, people may discuss these issues, but not as Christian concepts apart from the Divine will. Apart from the Divine will, such meaning is not Christian meaning. With respect to homosexual marriage, we have to first establish it is in accordance with the Divine will in order for the issue of injustice and inequality to arise when the church forbids such a practice. If

one grants that this is a sin or contrary to God's will, how can forbidding such a practice be characterized as unjust? *It is here that the flaw lies in these arguments: Proponents have not first established that homosexual marriage is in accordance with the Divine Will.* Let us restate this point in a different way. As laudable and lofty are the values of equality and justice (and they should ardently be promoted), they are not the adequate justification for homosexual marriage, if homosexual marriage cannot fulfill the purpose and function for which marriage was ordained by God. Here, a very clear Christian understanding of marriage is thus required before one can make a compelling argument for homosexual marriage.

Some Christian groups who support homosexual marriage claim that there are instances of homosexual relationship in the Bible. One that is often cited is the relationship between David and Jonathan in the Old Testament (I Samuel 18:1-5; 20:30-42).<sup>35</sup> Granted that this is the case (which we seriously doubt), so are incest, polygamy and adultery. What are we to make of these relationships too? As we have emphasized and shown by our method of scriptural interpretation, just because something is in the Bible does not make it normative for the Christian. The critical question is this: What light does the revelation of God in Christ shed on the text or issue? Is the practice or issue fundamentally linked to the God disclosed in Christ Jesus? This is the bottom line! Proof-texting can be dangerous at times. Satan used that to tempt Jesus!<sup>36</sup>

#### BASIC WEAKNESS OF THE SIX ARGUMENTS

These six arguments include some that are very compelling, challenging and forceful. Others are not so helpful in the discussion of relating as sexual beings,

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<sup>35</sup> Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: homosexuality in biblical times* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 25-40.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 4:1-11

especially with respect to marriage. Some raise more issues than they settle. Others challenge us to rethink our sexuality anew and consider its theological significance. *Their basic weakness is they are advanced out of the context of the Divine will and the authority of Scriptures.* Stated another way, the basic weakness of these arguments is their failure to address the will of God in this matter, and the authority of Scriptures, which mediate the will of God for the church.

Let us elaborate this basic weakness. When one characterizes a particular human relationship as marriage, what makes it a *marriage in the theological sense*? There are various kinds of human relationships. What is the very essence and structure of the marriage relationship, which sets it apart from all other human relationships? What is distinctive of the marriage relationship? Stated another way, **what constitutes marriage in the theological sense as a divine institution in the gamut of human relationships?** *Is there a formal divine pattern that a human relationship must conform to in order to be considered apriori marriage?* Phrased in light of our fundamental theological axiom, *the will of God finds expression in particular concrete form.* Since marriage is an expression of the will of God for human beings, what is the normative concrete form or structure of the marriage relationship? The proponents of homosexual marriage have not yet addressed this fundamental question: *What is the formal structure of any human relationship to be considered marriage in the theological sense?* Are there some human relationships off limits? If so, what kind and on what basis? Phrased in a different way, what is the basic prior consideration in the designation of all human relationships in which marriage is the foundation? As an example, when you call one your brother and another your sister or sister-in-law, what makes one your brother and the other your sister

or sister-in-law? Or, when you call one your father and the other your mother, what constitutes the basis for the distinction in the characterization? What makes such characterization formally possible? These, it should be noted, are different human relationships. We need a firm grasp of the concept that makes these distinctions possible if we will discuss the present issue intelligently and make sense. This kind of issue lies at the heart of the homosexual marriage debate, and these arguments in support of homosexual marriage have yet to address. It is our considered view that the Christian understanding of marriage should be the basis for any argument in support of homosexual marriage in the context of the church.

In thinking about homosexual marriage the statement by Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen is appropriate here: *"How we think about any given matter, and how we do not do so, is crucial. The categories we think with as we think about something are vital for the moral content and outcome."*<sup>37</sup> "Italics added."

We invite the reader now to join us in reflecting on marriage in a different light. This way of thinking about marriage changes some of the questions to be asked, and indeed places marriage in a whole new category.

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<sup>37</sup>Bruce C. Birch and Larry R. Rasmussen, Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life revised (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 96.

# MARRIAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF A SACRAMENTAL UNIVERSE

## INTRODUCTION

This is a sacramental and moral universe. The universe has a “sacred character and mysterious significance” despite what Science has been able to reveal about it. In fact, the more Science reveals the more mystifying the grandeur and wonder of creation. In light of this one can understand why the Scriptures assert that, “the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows forth [God’s] handiwork.” The Scriptures further attest that, “ever since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible nature, namely [God’s]

eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”<sup>38</sup>  
Creation is in a sense an imprint of God; it bears the very stamp of the creator.

*There is order in the universe. There is a sense of ought-ness, in particular, in human society. In the social sense, this ought-ness is the moral foundation of human existence.* Morally, we cannot act any way we please in community, or treat our fellow human beings in any way we feel. Simply put, there are right ways to act and treat other people, especially as Christians. Theologically, our treatment of others and conduct should be based on, and reflect the, nature and character of God revealed in Christ Jesus, that is, it should be in accordance with the Divine Will.<sup>39</sup> We human beings are social beings as well as moral and spiritual.

#### EXPRESSION OF GOD’S WILL IN CREATION

The sacramental character of creation is the presupposition of the incarnation, for Jesus Christ “is the firstborn of all creation.”<sup>40</sup> Creation in whole and in part is a visible sign of the presence of God. The fundamental postulate of the self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ leads to the truth that in the midst of the ambiguity of life, **the gracious and purposeful will of God finds expression in concrete form.** Some examples of the concrete expression of the Divine will are these.

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<sup>38</sup> Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20

<sup>39</sup> The old debate as to which comes first, the will of God or the nature of God, will not be addressed. Suffice it to say for us, they are two sides of the same coin, one supposing the other. While it seems we give priority to God's will, the coin is later turned over as the reflection proceeds. In this method, the incarnational paradigm, this old debate about the will of God and the nature of God does not exist.

<sup>40</sup> Colossians 1:15

## CREATION

Creation is the manifest expression of the gracious and loving will of God. The will of God is to love, but love is the very nature of God. And this love is always expressive. In the Genesis account of creation, we encounter the phrase, "and God said, 'let there be.'" God is love and love is "letting-be."<sup>41</sup> Love is the expression of being for others, and so God expresses God-self in letting be. In the creative process, the Divine and gracious will finds expression, an outpouring and overflowing of the Divine heart. In this way God expresses God-being-for-others. In the creative act God lets others be. Creation is indeed the primordial expression of the Divine and gracious will in "letting-be."<sup>42</sup>

## INCARNATION

The incarnation is the explicit expression of the loving and gracious will of God for human redemption. Speaking of the incarnation, the writer of the gospel of John says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh . . . From the fullness of his grace we have received grace upon grace." Paul adds that, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>43</sup> The love of God is made manifest in the fullest way possible in the incarnation, for the fullness of God who is love was pleased to dwell in Jesus the savior. In the incarnation, God is with us, i.e., Immanuel. God is with us for our salvation. God is with us for communion, and God is with us communicating life and love to sustain us. God comes to be with us in the person of

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<sup>41</sup>John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Scribner, 1977), 197-201.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>John 1:1, 14, 16; II Corinthians 5:21.

Jesus the Christ that we may become what God intends for us to be. The incarnation establishes the ministry of reconciliation--God working for the redemption of humankind, and thus the restoration of humankind's broken relationship with God.

#### CHURCH

The Church is the concrete expression of the continuing ministry of Jesus in a world lost in sin and on its way to self-destruction. It is the will of God for the redemption of the world. This will of God for human salvation continues to find concrete expression in the form of the Church after the exaltation of the incarnate God until the realization of this will in the eschatological kingdom.

#### HUMAN BEINGS

The creation of personal beings indicates God's will to be in fellowship with creation. The creation of human beings epitomizes and concretizes this will of God. God is love and love is relational. The very heart of God expresses a life of fellowship. This truth is expressed by the trinitarian concept. God is disclosed as the God who is in relationship with God-self. This relatedness overflows into the creative process by the creation of personal beings. God creates human beings in such a way as to be able to commune with God.<sup>44</sup> Human beings are accountable to, and therefore addressable by, God. Human beings are stewards of God, who are created to oversee the earth and other creatures. The theological implication of the statement that human beings are created in the image of God is that human beings are related to God in some way, they are God's image bearers. More specifically, it implies that on the personal level human beings can relate to God; humans

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<sup>44</sup>Gen. 1:26-3:24. Human beings are a kind of representative of God on earth.

can fellowship with God. The story of salvation history is the story of God's endeavor to realize this fellowship with human beings.

## MARRIAGE

God created human being as male and female. Marriage is the concrete expression of the Divine will for human beings to live in relationship, in community. When God created the male, God said it was not good for man to be alone. Next, the female was created; then God declared the goodness of human existence. This characteristic goodness of human community is what is referred to as the social nature of human beings. But what is the significance of human being having been created male and female? The theological significance of this is that human being is created in diversity and complementarity and that is good. Marriage is the concrete expression of the goodness of the diversity and complementarity of human life in community. We see this diversity all over the world, what we refer to as ethnicity, the races, languages, and the various features of human beings from different places. They call for celebration and not discrimination, tribalism and racism. More will be said later. For now, we assert that, if it is the will of God for human beings to get married, there must be concrete form for the expression of this Divine will in human society.

If the divine communion of the Trinity is the foundation of creation, then the human communion formed by marriage is the foundation of a new human life and thus of human community. If the very heart of God expresses a life of Divine fellowship as indicated by the Trinity, then the very essence of human life is life together with other fellow human beings as indicated by marriage.

## MARRIAGE AND THE NEW CREATION

“When one is in Christ, that one is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come.” We no longer regard anyone in Christ as merely human; each person as the new creation is in essence a “normative sacrament,” through whom the grace of God is mediated; for in each person the Holy Spirit dwells. We become ambassadors of Christ and God is making appeal through us. Each individual as the new creation becomes an efficacious, living sacrament as that one yields oneself wholly unto God for God’s purpose to do with as God chooses. Each Christian as member of the church, the Body of Christ, becomes integral to the means of Christ’s continuing redemptive work in the world. Even as Christ the first fruit of the new creation was fully yielded to God for God’s purpose, as joint heir with Christ, each believer is expected to follow this pattern for the new creation through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We no longer live unto ourselves. We now live unto God for the glory of God. The life we now live is the life of Christ in us.

What are some of the implications of this new creation for us as Christians? What does this mean for marriage in the earthly sense? And what specifically does it mean for the structure or form of Christian marriage in the new creation here on earth? We emphasize *here on earth* because there will be no marriages in heaven.

As our method of theological reflection has shown, i.e., the incarnational paradigm, there is continuity as well as discontinuity. There is permanence as well as change. Some things change, some things remain the same. Even in the new creation, this holds true. When Jesus Christ resurrected with a glorified body, he still bore the marks of

the nails in his hands. He had a glorified body, but still his human body. Yes, while Jesus now possessed a transformed body that could even pass through walls, it was still in a sense the same human body. He needed that body for the disciples to see him in person. Some things have changed; yet, some things remained the same. Yes, Jesus had changed; yet, he was the same person. This is to say in the new creation, some things remain the same in our earthly existence, required for life on earth.

Here then are some implications of the new creation in light of our incarnational paradigm.

1. One's vocation or ministry in the new creation is no longer limited by one's gender, family, or social class. It is now based fundamentally on one's call by God. In the old order, as exemplified by the Old Testament, the female could not be a priest, and neither could those males who were not of the lineage of Aaron. All of that has changed in the new order. The female can now exercise the office of the priesthood once called by God, and so can those not of the lineage of Aaron. However, even in this new creation, only the female can give birth to a child; thus, only the female can be called to the vocation of motherhood in that sense. That has not changed with the ushering in of the new creation. What this implies is that marriage is a vocation, and not all persons are called to this vocation. Not everyone can be a husband or wife. While in the old order everyone was expected to get married, this is no more the expectation in this new order ushered in by the Christ event. Some are called to a life of celibacy by God while others by choice, and still others by circumstances.

2. Before the Lord, the woman and man in marriage are equal. The female should not be viewed as inferior and having no rights in the marriage relationship. While the male is still the head of the family, both husband and wife are to “submit to each other out of reverence for Christ.” Headship (or leadership) now means servant-hood in the new creation as exemplified by Christ Jesus.
3. In the new creation, love is now seen as central to the institution of marriage. That has not always been. However, in the new creation as well as the old order, **God’s love is always properly expressed in the context of the divine will.** This spiritual truth has not changed even with the ushering in of the new creation. Stated another way, **the loving and gracious will of God finds expression in particular concrete form in the new creation as well as the old.** The resurrected life of the risen Lord validates this theological truth in the new creation. But just how the new creation has affected the marriage structure, i.e., does the structure of marriage belong to the changing or permanent aspect of marriage? This question will have to wait till later. We will first need to ascertain whether or not there is a normative marriage structure, and if so, how has it been affected by the ushering in of the new creation?

What we have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter is that creation is an expression of God’s will; and God’s will finds expression in concrete form even in the new creation. This theological truth will become very important later in this reflection.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The reader may wonder why we have not raised the sacramental character of marriage at this stage? At the appropriate time this will be done. Doing so now would not be very helpful; it would prejudice the discussion. Secondly, in a sacramental universe, anything, even that which is contrary to the will of God can be used of God to accomplish God’s purpose. The Scriptures are replete with many examples.

# THE CHRISTIAN AND THE MORAL LIFE

## INTRODUCTION

That this is a moral universe implies purpose, meaning, and ought-ness to creation. More so for us human beings, it means human life has a moral dimension. It implies that human life is to be lived above the impulses of natural instinct because morality quite often keeps natural instinct in check and sometimes demands of human beings to go against the grain of natural instinct. One of the fundamental human instincts is the instinct of self-preservation. But morality, in this case Christian morality as disclosed in the Christ event, calls us to self-sacrifice in service, if necessary with our

very life, in behalf of others. The natural inclination is to look after one's own interest; Christian morality calls us to a life of selflessness. Natural instinct calls the human creature to fulfill his/her natural sexual urges at puberty, but Christian morality calls us to fulfill those urges in the context of marriage. This often means waiting for a long period or a call to celibacy. Natural impulses and instincts move us to do and have what we want and desire now. Quite sometimes, these impulses serve useful purpose as in getting a drink when I am thirsty. But human life as a moral life is not ultimately dictated by natural impulses and instincts in the Christian context. Morality calls us to a life of discipline, a life of purpose, a life in community with others and a higher order of life not dictated irresistibly by instinct.

The spiritual as well as the moral quality of human life implies a transcendent dimension to life. It calls the human life beyond the self to a higher order of existence with other human beings for the fulfillment of God's purpose in our lives as a community of beings. Spirituality in this sense is inextricably linked with the religiosity of human beings and has a profound theological significance in the Christian context.

## VALUE SYSTEM

Central to the concept of morality is the notion of value system: right and wrong, good and evil. We value some things and devalue others as morally bankrupt. Some things or conduct adds to the moral quality of life while others do not. Simply stated it means we put moral premium on some things. Some things take on more importance than others. In the United States for example, individual right is a very important value. There is so much attached to the rights of the individual that the deaths of 32,351 persons in 2011 in the report of CDC (Center for Disease Control) in the U.S. by firearms did not move the nation to even accept meaningful regulations on the purchase of firearms as a

measure to protect society against the danger of firearms. Such regulations were considered by most people as an infringement on the rights of the individual to bear arms despite these deaths. On the other hand, some societies attach so much importance to the good of the whole community that in many parts of the world, they will deny the individual of personal freedom for the good of society, or deny freedom of expression for the sake of the community. Many persons have lost their lives in the process of denying them this freedom. Value system is integral to human beings as moral creatures.<sup>46</sup> *What is morally acceptable in one society may be morally reprehensible in another society.*

In this light, theological reflection on moral issues is fundamentally concerned in one respect in stating clearly as possible the value system from which Christians ought to conceive the moral life and operate. Such value system provides the framework in making moral judgments in the Christian sense.<sup>47</sup> The ambiguity of the moral life makes this a very serious undertaking for enlightened action. That we need to clarify certain Christian values relevant to the discussion on hand, which will provide the framework in making judgment about the issue of homosexual marriage, should be clear at this time. Here are some of these values:

## LOVE

Love is the spontaneous free expression of our being for others. Love is the creative expression of the self in being for others. Christian love in this sense is appropriately other-directed, self-giving, and therefore for the up-building of the community of beings. Insofar as one is part of the community of beings and is capable of standing outside of the self and taking an objective view of the self, the self can become an object of Christian love. The "other" in this sense is then the proper object of Christian love, but always in the context of the community, or in light of one's action

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<sup>46</sup>Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, Homosexuality: A Symbolic Compulsion (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 1, 8-13.

<sup>47</sup>J. Philip Wogaman, Christian Moral Judgment (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1989), 8, 16.

upon others. There cannot be a true expression of Christian love toward oneself without this transcendence of the self because without it, such expression of love degenerates into self-centeredness.

Much of what passes as Christian love is enlightened self-love.<sup>48</sup> This story may help define this kind of love. The grandma of a little boy was very sick. Concerned that he would not receive his breakfast the next morning, the little boy prayed, "Dear God, please make Grandma well because she is the one who prepares my breakfast."

Apparently, the real motive or reason the little boy was deeply concerned about Grandma's well-being was the "use" of Grandma to him. For many Christians, they become concerned or show kindness or take a course of action because of the benefit to them, though indirect the benefit may be. If there is no cost benefit to them, many Christians will not see the need to take up such a cause. Christian love is truly sacrificial. The way of true love involves the way of the cross.

But Christian love cannot be expressed in anyway. The means of expressing Christian love, or the context, is critical at times in defining this love. Thus, the means of expressing Christian love must be appropriate for the given relationship for it to be defined as Christian love. While the husband may properly express his love for his wife through sexual intimacy, such act with another man's spouse would certainly not be defined as Christian love, neither with his daughter. The point is there are appropriate means as well as the appropriate contexts, which go into defining Christian love. The next value will add further clarity.

## GOD'S WILL

God's intention for the created order, including human beings, is integral to the will of God. The will of God is in one sense the other side of God's love. In another sense, the will of God is the vehicle for expressing the love of God. Whenever one

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 112f

carries out acts of love according to God's will, that one is expressing the love of God through the proper means. The analogy between the will of God and the love of God in this sense is the analogy between the context and the content and both are inseparably linked. Phrased another way, outside of the will of God one cannot express true Christian love. **To be Christian love it must have the quality of the Divine will.** The will of God becomes the context for the spontaneous and free expression of our being for others. The ministry of Jesus Christ is paradigmatic of the spontaneous and free outpouring of our being for others in the context of the Divine will.

The will of God is not always clear; that is why the Christian needs to constantly rely on the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit in prayer and meditation and the Scriptures. Reliance on the Holy Spirit and Scriptures does not, however, remove the difficulty in knowing God's will in every situation as Jesus' struggle in the garden of Gethsemane illustrates.<sup>49</sup> But when one makes use of the order of creation, certain created structures, in accordance with their created purpose and intention, one is doing God's will. For example, when one kills an animal and uses it for food, one is acting in accordance to God's will; or when one drinks water when he is thirsty, that one is acting according to God's will.

In this regard, creation is an expression of God's will. The order of creation provides certain structures and places certain limitations for the free outpouring of our being for others. Time, space, gravity, water, and human being as male and female are just but a few of these elements integral to the order of creation, which structure our life in certain way rather than another. **It must be asserted that any talk about love in the context of Christian ethics divorced from any formal connection with the Divine will as manifested in the created order is a distortion and can be misguided and misleading.**

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<sup>49</sup> Luke 22:39-46

## FREEDOM

Christian freedom is the openness in being. It is essentially the openness to enter into communion with God and one's fellow human beings, for this is what it means to be human. "For freedom Christ has set us free" we are told.<sup>50</sup> But God in Christ sets us free in the will of the Lord and not out of that will. For out of that will is bondage and disorientation of life. Put differently, freedom is never expressed in a vacuum; it is always in a context and the wider context is the created order. Christian freedom in this sense is never the absence of all restraints, for the parameters of Christian freedom are defined by God's will through the created order.

## LIFE IN COMMUNITY

Properly understood the Christian life is life in community. We have already made reference to the communal life of human beings by God's creation of human being as male and female. The Church which refers to the Christians as a community of believers literally means an assembly before the Lord, hence a group. Jesus' statement that where two or three are gathered in his name there he is present implies the communal nature of the life of the believers.

Our sense of self-worth originates from, and is re-enforced in, interaction with other people. This is also the case of one's identity. It is in community with other human beings that we develop our sense of identity. Human beings need each other to become what God intends for them to be. But these others can also have devastating effect on one's life. This is why the quality of the relationship the parents have with their children when they are growing up has profound impact on their personality even later in life. The nature of the relationship in a community influences life in that community. My behavior or life in community in the Christian context is then never just a matter of my personal affairs; for who I am has influence on other people, for better or for worse. It is

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<sup>50</sup>Gal. 5:1.

here that the concept of role model finds its root. The Christian life must therefore be lived between the polarity of the individual and the community, between one's interest and the interest of others. The guiding rule in this life of polarity is doing God's will.

## SYMBOL

Symbols are of profound significance and value in the religious context. No religious person can claim that religious symbols are not of value. This point cannot be over-emphasized. In discussing symbol as a Christian value in ethics, some may think we are in uncharted territory. *We deem it absolutely necessary to discuss this concept profoundly significant and central to religion, and thus for religious practices and the way certain religious people understand themselves and their world.* Symbols, as indicated by our earlier examples, (chapter two) are not limited to religion. Flags of nations were mentioned as very common symbols. Have you ever wondered why during its independence or such celebration, one of the first things a new nation presents to the world is its flag? I know of no present-day nation without a flag. Have you also wondered why soldiers on the battlefield give their lives to keep the flag hoisted, and not allow it to fall into the hands of the enemy? When you encounter the picture of the human skull in the vertex of a cross or X, you know right away that it means danger. You are to avoid entering. In fact, it may actually be a real skull on a pole. It communicates the same message; here the ethical dimension of symbol is on display. These examples are instances indicative of the profound significance and value of symbols in human society.

Symbol as a value is communal. Symbol arises in the context of a community. Symbol is integrative, it conveys a sense of coherence. Symbol communicates. Symbol orders our life in certain ways. Indeed, symbols create social reality. Symbol is transcendent. Symbol connotes that life or reality is more than one's own little world. Reality is far greater than that. Symbol accentuates the ontological-existential dimension of reality.

Symbol is the shorthand for communicating the mystery of life in the spiritual sense. Even Israel that was told not to make an image of God had religious symbol - the Ark of the Covenant. Before then, there was the pillar of cloud with them in the wilderness from the beginning at the crossing of the Red Sea, or the bronze snake on the pole symbolizing Christ (in the New Testament). The symbols essentially manifested in a concrete, visible way the presence of God with Israel, even though the symbols did more than that. But central to other functions was the symbols' concretization of the Divine presence.

What is a symbol? Webster gives two related definitions:

- 1) something used for or regarded as representing something else: a material object representing something; often something immaterial;
- 2) a word, phrase, image, or the like, having a complex of associated meanings and perceived as having inherent value separable from that which is symbolized, as being part of that which is symbolized, and as performing its normal function of standing for or representing that which is symbolized: usually conceived as deriving its meaning chiefly from the structure in which it appears.<sup>51</sup>

"The realm of . . . symbol" according to Sawicki, "is the realm of human communication" and the symbol is "used to denote various realities . . ." In theology "symbol still carries the [basic] meaning to draw or throw or hurl together . . . The pulling together of the symbol implies a sharing of being among the elements that are pulled together."<sup>52</sup> *Thus in its symbolic function, symbol integrates the distinctive elements that are brought together and conveys a profound truth.* "The truth" is made "effective," concrete, and visible in this symbolization. Among the various elements integrated in the symbol, "their connection is not artificial or superficial; but rather it is a deep and necessary relation of things among which there is really an apparent and/or a logical distinction."<sup>53</sup> Some important theological Christian symbols are "Jesus, the Church and

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<sup>51</sup>Webster's *Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Portland, 1989), 1440.

<sup>52</sup>Marianne Sawicki, *The Gospel in History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 11-12.

the sacraments . . .” They "are symbols because they are (in different degrees, to be sure) expressions of God's own self as it is reaching out toward us."<sup>54</sup> In the theological context, "the term symbol usually is used in cases where what is being pulled together are, on the one hand, a transcendent spiritual reality, and on the other hand, one or more concrete, tangible, expressions or realizations of that reality . . . Symbol pulls together the transcendent and the concrete. It literally makes present . . ."<sup>55</sup>

In anticipation of the present discussion of homosexual marriage, we will present marriage as a spiritual symbol which conveys certain reality in a concrete tangible way, "deriving its meaning chiefly from the structure in which it appears" by pulling together distinctive elements which have "apparent and logical distinction."

## MARRIAGE AS A SPIRITUAL SYMBOL

### INTRODUCTION

We human beings were created for relationship, and thus for life in community. *The human community is a series of concentric circles*, each having its set of obligations and interests to be affirmed and honored for life in community and our well-being. The inner most circle is the marriage relationship which gives rise to the family, and the family gives rise to the community, and the community gives rise to the human society. The marriage thus gives rise to the family which family is the foundation of the

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

community, and thus the human society. We see what happens to the community when the marriage breaks down, especially to the children.

In this chapter, *we present marriage as a spiritual or theological symbol. This means marriage represents something profoundly divine and it derives its meaning “from the structure in which it appears” by bringing together the distinctive elements of the human being.* As spiritual symbol, it means marriage represents a spiritual reality, and the marriage structure has a logical and intrinsic connection to that which it symbolizes, and at the same time, “has value apart from that which it symbolizes.” In the end, we will show that the normative marriage structure is linked fundamentally to God and reflective of the nature and attribute of God made known in the revelation of God in Christ Jesus.

#### ALLUSION TO MARRIAGE AS SYMBOL

There are intimations in the Scriptures and other sources that point to conceiving marriage as a symbol. In the Old Testament, marriage is used as a symbol to depict the kind of relationship that exists between God and the nation of Israel as the elect of God.<sup>56</sup> The prophet Hosea is the Old Testament prophet well known for this use of marriage to represent God's boundless love for the chosen people as a husband's love for his wife. Indeed, the "prophet's personal life is an incarnation of God's redeeming love."<sup>57</sup> He

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<sup>56</sup>Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2; 3:1; Hosea 2:14-20; Ezekiel 16:8-14.

<sup>57</sup>The New Oxford Annotated Bible, "Introductory Notes" to Hosea.

marries a harlot at the command of the Lord. She leaves Hosea after bearing three children for him. The prophet goes and takes her back as his wife.<sup>58</sup> *The imagery of the marriage is vividly portrayed in the book of Hosea as God's faithful relationship to the people of God incarnated in Hosea's life.*

In the Old Testament, the marriage symbol is used to accentuate God's "faithfulness, mercy" and forgiveness even as the people of God are unfaithful. What is important for us here is the use of the marriage imagery to depict God's relationship of love to the people of God.

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel make essentially the same point as they use marriage as the symbol of God's relationship to the elect of God.<sup>59</sup> Schillebeeck indicates that this use of the marriage "image by the prophets involves a 'reciprocal illumination' of the human meaning of marriage. Their use of this image communicates not only the utterly faithful love of God for his people but also the *normative reality of marriage - the divinely intended, faithful, and exclusive union of man and woman.*"<sup>60</sup> (Italics added).

In the New Testament marriage is depicted as the symbol of the relationship between Christ and his church.<sup>61</sup> The writer of Ephesians "uses the love of husband and wife as a symbol of the love of Christ for faithful humanity."<sup>62</sup> Here again the marriage image is used to depict something divine - the love of the Lord towards the people of God.

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<sup>58</sup>Some scholars question the historicity of the prophet's marriage. What is most important is that this story of a husband's love for his wife helps us to understand God's love for us.

<sup>59</sup>Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16:8-14.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted by Rowland Lawler, O.F. M. Cap., Joseph Boyle, Jr. and William E. May, Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary Explanation and Defense (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.), 22.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew 22:1-15; Ephesians 5:21-30.

<sup>62</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 106.

What do Christian scholars and others have to say about marriage as symbol? Here are but a few references. Leonardo Boff uses the family constituted by marriage to speak of "*family symbolism*."<sup>63</sup> Here the family brought into being (father, mother, child) is an "*expression of the Trinity, with an emphasis on the unity of the triune God*."<sup>64</sup> (Italics added). Mark Christopher asserts that "*the ultimate purpose of marriage is seen in that marriage reflects God and his image*." (Italics added). Human beings "are image-bearers."<sup>65</sup> Christopher is on to something more profound. He says in essence that the purpose of marriage is to "reflect" who God is and God's likeness.

Arthur A. Rouner asserts that *sex is a "sign and symbol*."<sup>66</sup> Sexual intercourse is the powerful symbolic and sign attributing factor of marriage. His discussion is from traditional Christian perspective in which sexual ethics is considered in the context of marriage. *Sexual intercourse is a "symbol meant to represent the unity between two people in marriage, a sign . . . to create and underscore and recreate the unity" of the two persons*. (Italics added). This is a sign and symbol of "oneness, commitment and intimate identity with the other."<sup>67</sup> For Rouner, what actually sets the marriage relationship apart from all others is sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse properly belongs to marriage and is therefore integral to it. Outside of that sex loses its symbolic function or the symbol's meaning is changed. Here, there is an intimate connection between sex and symbol.

For Carl Jung, the psychiatrist and psychologist, *sexuality as a whole is a symbol*. *It is a "symbol of wholeness and integration in the union of the opposites, and as an image of the Divine-human encounter*."<sup>68</sup> (Italics added). These are strong and thought-

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Christopher, *Same-Sex Marriage: Is it really the same?* (Ryelands Road, Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), 105.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur A. Rouner, *Struggling With Sex: A Serious Call to Marriage-Centered Sexual Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 37-46.

<sup>67</sup> Arthur A. Rouner, *Struggling With Sex: A Serious Call to Marriage-Centered Sexual Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 37-46.

provoking statements from this well-known psychiatrist and psychologist. The "union of the opposites" which in the Christian sense is the formal structure of marriage, is for Jung a symbol of something profoundly divine. What might that something be?

Other authors could be cited. These citations are however fair representations for our purposes on the range of views regarding marriage as a symbol. One sees from all these samplings that marriage or some things closely associated with marriage - family, sex, human being as male and female, and the purpose of marriage - are alluded to as symbol. There is something out there that these authors are struggling to get a handle on. What is it? *It may help to recall that symbol is a shorthand for communicating the mystery of life in religious or spiritual sense.* No wonder the struggle by these authors in communicating this mystery! Somehow, in viewing marriage and its constituent elements as symbols, we are peeping into the mystery of Divine life. Is it any wonder that the *Catholic Church has raised marriage to the level of sacrament?* Essentially, this means marriage is a symbol, and thus through it, God reaches out to us and conveys some divine truth, yea, the very being of God.

What can we say about these allusions to marriage as symbol or its close connection with symbol? More specifically, what can we make of these references in Scriptures to marriage as symbol? In response to what can be said, let us pay careful attention to the use of simile or comparison.

When one likens something to another, there is implied in that comparison in the context of the present discussion (symbolism) a common feature which can be formally shown to be reflected in an other, in the things under consideration. The qualification "formally" is very significant because it points to something that is not incidental. Here, Schillebeeck's "reciprocal illumination" becomes helpful in making this point. When the prophets and the New Testament use the symbol of marriage, they are not saying, "see

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<sup>68</sup>Quoted by Morton Kelsey and Barbara Kelsey, Sacrament of Sexuality: The Spirituality and Psychology of Sex (Rockport, MA: Element, 1991), 11.

how great marriage love is in practice in Israel. Just as our men love our women, this is how God loves us." While many comparisons are in this form, this is not, however, what the Scriptures intend to communicate by the symbol of marriage. What then are they saying? 1) Whenever we see the case of true love a man has for his wife, *it reflects God's faithful relationship to the people of God*. This is the thrust, especially of Hosea, where he incarnates this love in his marriage to help us catch a glimpse of God's love for us. *Here a husband's love for his wife illumines God's love for us*. 2) Just as God loves the people of God, this ought to be *the quality of love* the husband has for his wife. This is in fact what the Ephesians passage says, that just as Christ loved the Church, this is how men ought to love their wives. Here Christ's love illumines the meaning of marital love, hence "reciprocal illumination."

Furthermore, the passage implies that the husband and wife relationship ought to be a concrete representation or a reflection of Christ's love for the Church, or God's love for the people of God in the case of the Old Testament passage. But the husband and wife relationship ought not be a concrete representation of this Divine love except to begin with, it was meant to be. *There is something intrinsic and normative about how God ordered the relationship in marriage, which makes it serve in the formal as well as in the material sense, a symbol of God's relationship to the people of God*. This is another way of saying that the loving and gracious will of God finds expression in concrete form. Marriage, including the very structure, is a concrete expression of the divine will and not a mere expression of human thought or institution. As an expression of Divine will, marriage has a normative structure.

As we have attempted to show, marriage as a symbol is not foreign to the Scriptures. What is, however, new in our reflection is that this *symbol* will now be used to refer to the internal reality of God reflected in human community. What is that normative structure of marriage, which is a reflection of the Divine, we may ask? Or, to use the concept of reciprocal illumination, *what is the nature and internal attribute of*

*God, which is normative for the structure of marriage, which makes it such that marriage can serve as a symbol?* For this question, we turn now to the Trinity and the incarnation.

#### THE INCARNATION, TRINITY AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

The incarnation discloses God as the Triune God. It is in the image of this Triune God that human beings have been created. The Christ event discloses God as fellowship in unity, or community in unity. The Trinitarian confession is borne out of the experience of the Christian community of the rich, full and self-giving life of God in the self-disclosure of God in Christ. It is in the final analysis a qualitative term; for as the gospel of John says, ". . . from his [sic] fullness have we all received, grace upon grace."<sup>69</sup>

Christian theologians have tried to fathom what precisely is the image of God in human being. *Appeal has been made to human being's transcendence, that is human being's ability to stand outside of himself or herself and take an objective look at the self. Human rationality, morality, the human soul or spirit and other qualities have been postulated as central to the image of God in human being.* Generally speaking, we concur that these qualities are all integral to what it means that human being is created in the image of God. However, any one of these qualities by itself (alone) does not adequately convey the concept of the image of God. It is our understanding and conviction that all of these qualities are taken up in the term *personal being* in the Christian sense.<sup>70</sup> They describe what we have come to understand by *personal being*. And what is more, Jesus Christ as *personal being* is the express image of the Almighty God, and human beings are created in that image (Col. 1:15).

In the self-disclosure of God, God has been revealed as *Personal Being*. As personal Being God is transcendent, God wills, God enters into relationship. God shows

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<sup>69</sup>John. 1:16.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. expresses similar thought. See, Alex Ayres (ed.), *The Wisdom of Martin Luther King, Jr. : An A-Z guide to the ideas and ideals of the great civil rights leaders* (N.Y. :Penguin Books, 1993), 175

compassion, God is Spirit, God has knowledge, and God has morality. Since humankind is created in the image of God, human beings exhibit these qualities, though to a lesser degree. In the ultimate sense, God alone is the Person; human beings are simply created in the image of this Personal Being.<sup>71</sup>

Fundamental in the self-disclosure of God as Personal Being is God as the related God (Immanuel). Relatedness is at the heart of the God made known in the Christ event. God wills to be with human beings, to enter into communion with them. God does not only relate to human beings; God also relates to God-self.<sup>72</sup> The Trinitarian concept is a theological articulation of the related God's relationship to God-self. In the eternal life of God, there is an eternal *distinction*, which is disclosed by the incarnation. Through the incarnation we come to know that the one "God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence God is in [God-self] a God who is in fellowship with [God-self]."<sup>73</sup>

*"Relationship is the key to understanding the idea" of the Trinity.* In the life of the Triune God, "it is through relationship that one Person is situated in relation to the others and differentiated from them each essentially supposing and requiring the others," and these "relationships are entities in themselves" and "constitute the Persons" of the Godhead. This is to say, "each relationship is identified with the divine substance."<sup>74</sup> This truth can be seen in the expression that love is considered the essential nature of God. To speak of love is to speak of relationship. The divine substance shared by all three Persons of the Trinity is therefore Divine love.

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<sup>71</sup> Emil Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 22-24, 93f

<sup>72</sup>C.f. Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 45.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Boff, 92

In the life of the Triune God, there is eternal *distinction and differentiation and equality*, which is the source of the full rich life of God. "Diversity-in-communion is the source-reality in God, whose unity can only be the union of this personal diversity."<sup>75</sup>

If relatedness is fundamental to the Personal Being that is God, then creatures made in the image of this God must somehow manifest this character or quality of relationship.<sup>76</sup> God created human being not to be alone but to be in relationship, in fellowship and in community. Here then is a pointer to the *relatedness* along with the *distinction* which is fundamental to the Triune life of God; human being is created as *differentiated* being in relationship: male and female. Community is fundamental to the life of personal beings as disclosed by the incarnation. The mystery of the Divine Being is that God manifests this community nature while God remains yet one. The Triune God is fellowship in unity. Human beings as spatio-temporal creatures can at best manifest unity in fellowship by virtue of their creatureliness.

In the Triune life of God, each Person of the Trinity is essentially and truly God. However, it is the three Persons who properly constitute the one God whom the Christians worship. In an analogous way, each human being, be it male or female, is essentially and truly created in the image of God (as personal being), but it is the human being as male and female who is properly said to be created in the image of God (as personal beings). God created human beings as beings-in-relationship. Humanity at its very foundation is "shared humanity." Human existence is therefore an existence in relationship.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid. , 128

<sup>76</sup>Paul Jewett, 35.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 36. Our position is the synthesis of the theological position which views the image of God primarily in terms of personal being and links both human sexuality and marriage in the context of that being. In this view marriage is the symbol (concreteness) of the nature of personal beings as social beings.

The idea of existence as relationship can be further explored by an analysis of who Jesus is. Jesus is the Christ of God as the Scriptures indicate. If existence is fundamentally one of relationship, then Jesus the Christ who is the express image of God should somehow manifest at the deepest level of his being the idea of relationship. This manifestation can be seen in reference to Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus the Christ is identified with the Second Person of the Trinity- God the Son. He is therefore God incarnate. This phrase, *the Son of God*, with reference to Jesus means essentially God the Son. Sonship implies the notion of relationship. *If God is one and Jesus Christ is God the Son, then this one God must be a God who is eternally related to God-self as the Son; for the phrase God the Son in the Christian context does not mean another God in addition to the one God.* There is an eternal relationship and distinction in the one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is referred to as Trinity. The concept of the Trinity is, as we said earlier, a qualitative term.

The idea that relationship is central to the meaning of existence can also be seen from another point of view. The proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ about the Kingdom of God and human existence presupposes human beings' relationship to God. The gospel includes the bad news of human alienation from God and from one's fellow human creatures. Such a condition is spiritual death. It also includes the good news of reconciliation of human beings with God and one's fellow human creatures, for this is what Christ comes to accomplish: He comes to give us life. Seen in this way, the biblical witness of faith views human existence fundamentally in terms of relationship. One who is thus alienated from God is said to be dead as far as the gospel message is concerned. The same is true in the Old Testament, "Death means lack of relationship with God."<sup>78</sup> One who is reconciled to God is said to be alive. The parable of the Prodigal Son graphically depicts this view of human existence. When the younger son who has

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<sup>78</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 106; I Kings 2:10.

alienated himself from the fellowship of the family returns to the fellowship of the family, the father who represents God in this parable says, " My son who was dead is alive again . . ." <sup>79</sup>

So from the incarnational perspective, who God is (Trinity), who Jesus is (Christology) and what he came to do (Soteriology) establish firm theological foundation in viewing human existence as one of relationship. *Marriage is a concrete and visible representation, that is, symbol that life is essentially one of relationship.* Marriage cannot escape one as essentially one of relationship. And symbol is intended to make plain what otherwise may not be. Marriage is a concrete reflection that human life is essentially an existence in relationship.

If marriage symbolizes God's love for us human beings as the Scriptures indicate, then marriage is a concrete symbol of the very essence of God because God is love, and marriage symbolizes that love. "Marriage is a human reality pointing toward the mystery of God's love."<sup>80</sup> If God is love, then the mystery of God's love is the very mystery of the being of God, and it is that to which marriage points. To speak of God's love is to speak of not only the most profound of Divine communion shared in the Trinitarian fellowship, but also to speak of the very nature of God. Marriage in principle symbolizes this love, and to the extent that this love is made practical in marriage, it is the extent to which marriage approaches God's intention. *Those who therefore place emphasis on love as*

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<sup>79</sup>Luke 15:24.

In relational terms, one can perceive the truth on both sides of the theological debate about whether or not the image of God in human being has been destroyed after the fall. In the story of the prodigal Son, the relationship of father-son always exists between the father and the son even if the son renounces such a relationship. The son cannot undo the biological relationship established even by this alienation. But when the son left home, became alienated from the father, the realization of the relationship or the fellowship between the father and the son was no longer there. In an analogous way, human beings are always in the image of God in a formal sense even in disobedience and alienation. But materially, human being as alienated from God is not in the image of God; for to be in the image of God is to be in communion with God.

<sup>80</sup>Roland Lawler, Joseph Boyle, Jr. and William E. May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics*, 41.

*central to marriage are right, but it does not follow that there is no formal structure of this love relationship.* This formal structure will soon be elucidated.

*The cross, an important "symbol" in the worship of the church vividly illustrates the components of the relationship which constitutes the meaning of human existence.* Human beings are created to be in relationship with God (*the vertical bar of the cross*) and in relationship with one's fellow human creatures (*the horizontal bar of the cross*). Just as one cannot have the cross without any one of the bars, so also one cannot be truly human in the Christian sense if one is not living in fellowship with God and one's fellow human creatures. *Those who therefore make the Christian religion just a matter of one's individual private relationship with God are in grave error.* This is a serious distortion of the Christian faith, which needs to be corrected. Jesus sums up the entire Ten Commandments of God into one with two foci: love of God and love of one's fellow human beings. It is self-evident that to speak of love is to speak of the relationship at the heart of the Christian faith.

*In the incarnation, God took on human nature and became a human being, a particular sexual being - a full and complete normal human being. Human sexuality was integral to this fullness and completeness. Human sexuality as an aspect of God's creation is good because all that God created the Lord declared good.* Human sexuality relates the human person to other human beings by presenting the human being as dependent on each other for the perpetuation of human-being-in-the-world through the procreative act. In this regard, human sexuality points to the creatureliness of human existence as a finite and dependent being. In another sense, human sexuality relates humans to the Divine in that human sexuality grounds the human person in relationship. *Even as the Triune God is a God in relationship to God-self, so human sexuality presents human being in relationship to the human-self as male and female.* The story of the rib in the Genesis account points to this profound truth: the shared humanity of the male and female.

The "created determination of the sexes" which determination structures the human relationship for companionship, and the perpetuation of the human species and for rearing children (establishment of the home) is called marriage in the institutional form. This places marriage in the order of creation; it is an order of existence. This point is alluded to when the Scriptures say that from the beginning, God created human beings as male and female, one for the other in the expression of sexual love and the perpetuation of the human species. The male-female relationship becomes the formal structure as well as the God-ordained structure for this order of creation called marriage. *The male and female relationship therefore becomes the normative structure for the expression of conjugal love.*

#### THE UNITY OF THE GODHEAD AND THE GENESIS ACCOUNT OF MARRIAGE

What is the profound spiritual or theological truth, which is embodied in the biblical statement that from the very beginning, God created human being as male and female, one for the other in regard to holy matrimony? What is the basis for asserting that the male-female relationship becomes the formal structure as well as the God-ordained form of this order of creation called marriage? Our brief analysis of the life and nature of the Triune God above points to this fundamental structural unity in addition to *love* which is the very nature of God, namely, *distinction, differentiation and equality*. Indeed, the normative character of the marital relationship is *love*, the very nature of God. If marriage points to that mystery, which is *the inner life of God, namely love*, then the marriage structure should also reflect this structural unity of God as well. Let us summarize what our brief analysis has brought to light. A look at the Genesis account of the creation of human beings in light of the inner unity of God reveals these three inner attributes of God as the normative structure for human marriage:

### DISTINCTION

Instead of Adam getting married to himself, Adam needed another person to be his companion (another person). *God deliberately brought forth another person.*

### DIFFERENTIATION

Instead of Adam getting married to the person of the same gender, God brought forth a female for Adam (a different gender). *God intentionally brought forth a person of a different gender.*

### EQUALITY

Instead of Adam getting married to another being superior or inferior to Adam, God took a part of Adam, the rib, meaning of the same essence as Adam to create the female. The rib taken from Adam's side indicates *sameness and thus equality* (of the same essence).<sup>81</sup> God has a pattern for marriage. The marriage structure is a reflection of the distinction, differentiation, and equality in the Triune God. Indeed, human being is created in the image of God. Marriage symbolizes that divine reality. *And marriage exemplifies our fundamental premise, namely, the loving gracious will of God finds expression in particular concrete form. Marriage has a particular concrete structure.*

**The theological and spiritual significance of the Adam and Eve story regarding marriage is that it establishes marriage after the pattern and the nature of, and the relation in, the Godhead, for in God we live and move and have our being.**<sup>82</sup> The reflection of the inner unity or relation in the Godhead in the symbolic sense by marriage can only be achieved by the coming together of human being as male and female. The truth of this is further attested by procreation, manifesting God's creative act reflected in the marriage of man and woman. Human beings are image-

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<sup>81</sup> Genesis 2: 18-25. Whether or not one considers as historical the Adam and Eve story does not detract from its theological significance.

<sup>82</sup> Acts 17:28, cf. Phyllis Bird, "Genesis 1-11 as a Source for Contemporary Theology of Sexuality" *Ex Auditu* (1987). See also Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* translated by John J. Scullion, S.J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 142-161.

bearers of the Almighty God. Indeed, God created humankind in the image of God...male and female God created them. Marriage concretizes and makes this Divine truth visible! *Marriage symbolizes that personal being is ultimately interpersonal reality.*

*Marriage is a theological symbol; as such, it reflects a spiritual reality: the nature of personal being as interpersonal reality.* That spiritual reality is the inner life of God. True marriage is constituted by love and thus reflective of the very nature of God. As reflective of the relationship in the Godhead, marriage is theologically structured by the male and female genders pointing to the relation in the Godhead, namely, distinction, differentiation, and equality. Interestingly, the identical word used to describe the oneness of the man and his wife as *one flesh* in Genesis 2:24 is the same word used to describe the unity of God in Deuteronomy 6:4, where the writer declares that Israel's God is *one God*. We have earlier defined love as letting-be and that creation is the primordial expression of this Divine letting-be. In the symbolic sense, procreation is the basic expression of this letting-be in human beings, which is the result of the profound love expressed by a man and a woman in marriage. The distinction and differentiation in the human species as male and female makes this formally possible, and the distinction and differentiation are a reflection of the creator's life. *We assert that this internal attribute of God as distinction, differentiation and equality with love (the nature of God) as the core is normative for the nature and structure of marriage in the formal sense. They form the fundamental divine basis for the order of marriage in the Christian sense.* We see what happens when there is no love in a marital relationship. Many things go wrong, not to mention the harm to the children in such a relationship devoid of love. Those who emphasize love as the essence of marriage are right, but they err in implying that there is no definite structure for this expression of sacred love, or that certain formal relationships are not off limits, as long as the love is genuine, in this case, in marriage. If one grants that marriage is a *symbol* as we have argued, then the structure of the love relationship becomes critical in defining marriage. We may ask, is it mere human convention and

nothing more that people do not get married to their sisters or brothers or children; even though, they may be in love? Is there any moral consideration in this matter, if so, on what fundamental theological basis? As stated earlier, human beings are not merely sexual beings; they are also moral beings as well as spiritual beings. These truths ought to inform marriage as an order of creation. This truism may be stated theologically: **The love of God cannot be expressed outside the will of God.** While there are many ways to express God's love, *any expression of love that lacks the quality of the Divine will is not Christian love, no matter if such expression of love is valid in that society. This is the case even in marriage.*

The incarnation indicates that the expression of God's love in human community has definite form, so marriage, which symbolizes this love, the very nature of God, is expressed in a definite form. If Jesus Christ is the concrete manifestation of God's love, then a new born baby is in the normative sense the concrete, visible manifestation of the love between the husband and wife, and this procreation cannot be formally achieved by persons of the same gender. Even more so, in the self-giving of man and woman to each other in marriage in the procreative function, new life is made possible even as new life is made possible by the Divine self-giving in the incarnation. Procreation is also a symbol of the eternal generation of the Son in the Godhead.

To counter that the pattern of distinction, differentiation, and equality articulated herein is incidental to marriage, or is mere coincidence, or not of spiritual significance, is to imply that God was not deliberate in creating the structure of marriage, had no divine basis for marriage, or had no pattern in mind for marriage. Such critics may even go so far as to say the notion of any divine connection of marriage to God as such is suspect. Well, we need to be reminded that marriage is regarded in the Scriptures as a “great mystery.”<sup>83</sup> What is so great a mystery about two persons coming together in marriage,

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<sup>83</sup> Ephesians 5:32

except there is something profoundly divine as the basis for the marriage institution. This great mystery about marriage is in essence an allusion to marriage as something sacred; thus, marriage is used in Scriptures to symbolize the relationship between Christ and the church, a divine institution; and the relationship between God and the people of God. The institution of marriage is a great mystery because it is the symbol reflective of something profoundly divine; thus, it is sacramental. *Mystery* as used in Scriptures always has divine connection, it should be noted. It would make no theological or spiritual sense to refer to marriage as a “great mystery” as Scripture does without any divine connection, and then use it in a profound sense to talk about Christ’s relation to the Church.<sup>84</sup> This divine connection has long been acknowledged by the Catholic Church in declaring marriage as a Christian sacrament.

#### WHAT THE MARRIAGE SYMBOL COMMUNICATES

Symbol is supposed to make plain and concrete; but it seems sin has blinded us to what God intends to communicate through the symbol of marriage.<sup>85</sup> Symbol, it should be recalled, is in the realm of communication. Let us attempt to sketch some of what ought to be made plain and concrete through the marriage symbol as a medium of communication:

1. Human existence while personal is also always social and shared existence. A newborn baby is the result of the shared life and companionship of a man and a woman - physically and genetically. Marriage as a symbol is intended to concretize the nature and character of human existence as corporate, social and personal. *The marriage symbol communicates that we need each other for the perpetuation of human life on earth, and to become what God intends for us to become.*

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<sup>84</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, *Ideas & Issues of the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 370f; Nelson’s *New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Thomas Nelson publishers, 1995) , 872

<sup>85</sup> Symbol as indicated elsewhere is a form of shorthand. It must be said that symbol has a paradoxical character in that it concretizes as well as obscures. To the initiated it is lucid and illuminating, but to the uninitiated it obscures just as actual shorthand does.

2. Marriage is intended to communicate the oneness of humanity, and thus the equality of the genders in their theological significance. This is why the man and woman are said to be one in marriage. This truth is stated by Adam in the Genesis account when he declares, speaking of Eve, “[she] is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.”<sup>86</sup>

Human being is one species is what marriage communicates. The fact that races can intermarry and procreate is evidence of that; interracial marriages validate that biologically. If there is an inferior race, then the whole human race is inferior because we are all from the one stock. Marriage theologically and biologically understood debunks the idea of an inferior and superior race of people. *Marriage properly understood destroys the myth of a superior and inferior sex or gender.*

This point is reaffirmed in the incarnation by the statement that all human beings, be it male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or freed are one in Christ.<sup>87</sup> Marriage, by indicating that the male and female are one in holy wedlock, declares the equality of the sexes and thus of all human beings, which equality may not necessarily be obvious to human beings. But equality and oneness do not obliterate fundamental distinctions and role in marriage, even as the equality of the Persons in the Godhead and the oneness of God do not obliterate fundamental distinctions and eternal role in the triune life of God. To be one and equal in marriage does not mean that the male can be a wife or the female can be a husband in marriage, anymore than to say that since there is one God and Jesus Christ is truly God, God the Father died when Jesus Christ died on the cross.<sup>88</sup>

3. Marriage makes concrete the formal structure and context in which the gift of sexual love (coition) is expressed towards our fellow human beings in the Christian sense. This is the male-female relationship. This formal structure therefore excludes male-male or female-female structure. *Marriage therefore orders our life as sexual*

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<sup>86</sup> Genesis 2: 23

<sup>87</sup>Galatians 3:28

<sup>88</sup>This heresy in the Early Church came to be known as patripassianism, i.e. the suffering of the Father.

*beings by providing the formal context for the expression of sexual love and setting off limits certain relationships.*

4. Marriage is intended to articulate the sacred character of human existence. Our life is grounded in God who is Love. *Marriage communicates that we participate in that life of Divine love.* This character is made explicit by the reference to marriage as divine institution, sacred or sacramental. Marriage reflects the character of the Divine life - a life of love, mutual trusting and entrusting, a life of self-giving, a life of profound intimacy and openness.

5. Marriage is the symbol that *personal being is ultimately interpersonal reality.* When God created human being there was one defect--it was not good for human to be alone. That is to say God's creation as far as human was concerned was not complete. That completion became a reality with God bringing forth another human being. Marriage accentuates the social nature of human existence, which is a reflection of the creator's life. Personal being is essentially interpersonal reality, thus God is the Triune God.

Marriage and family are linked. Marriage links family to one purpose of marriage which purpose is the establishment of "a home" or "a mutual society."<sup>89</sup> Marriage and family are in one sense correlative. To speak of marriage implies the family and to speak of the family implies marriage. A marriage involves the coming together of two families represented by the bride and the groom, and the emerging or creation of a third family by this marriage. Thus, family creates marriage and marriage creates family. Marriage is a communal affair, which expresses the corporate and communal nature of human existence. It should be asserted that this character of marriage is disappearing in some societies.

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<sup>89</sup>A Service of Christian Marriage UMC Supplemental Worship Resources, (Nashville, Parthenon Press, 1973), 15

The family as the basic unit of society is established by marriage. The family as a basic unit of society brought into being by marriage manifests a triad. The integral parts of the family created by marriage are: i) the family of the bride represented by the bride, ii) the family of the groom represented by the groom, and iii) the new family created by the union of the bride and the groom. The text of the UMC Book of Worship states it this way, "The marriage . . . unites two families and creates a new one."<sup>90</sup> It is needless to say that there is no dissolution of the integrity of each of the three families involved in the marriage. There co-exist three distinct families in a marriage union. Here again in marriage is intimation, though in a rudimentary way, of the triune life of the Christian God. Marriage concretizes or materializes the reflection of the life of the Triune God in human existence, namely, the nature of God (*love*), and the inner life of God (*distinction, differentiation, and equality*).

The symbolic character of marriage makes marriage religious and sacramental. As a religious symbol, marriage orders our life as sexual beings and how the gift of sex ought to be properly enjoyed. Much more so, it reflects the love of God, the very nature of God. As a religious symbol, it means that marriage is divine and has value apart from that which it symbolizes, as it integrates the "transcendent spiritual reality" of Divine fellowship and the "tangible [distinct] expressions or realization of that reality," namely, human beings as male and female.<sup>91</sup> The human species would have ceased to exist long ago if there were only one gender or if homosexual marriage had been the norm from the beginning of creation and adhered to.

Marriage is sacramental in that it manifests formally the Divine fellowship from the point of view of creation, while the church as sacramental of God's salvation manifests formally the Divine fellowship from the point of view of redemption. It is in

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<sup>90</sup>UMC, United Methodist Book of Worship, (UMC, 1992), 117

<sup>91</sup>Sawicki, 12.

connection with the manifestation of Divine fellowship that the theological truth of the Scriptures use of the marriage analogy with respect to Christ's relation to the church is to be perceived. Marriage is a great mystery precisely because it symbolizes the great mystery of Divine fellowship.<sup>92</sup> And this Divine fellowship symbolized by marriage has a definite pattern. This pattern is one of distinction, differentiation, and equality. As a true symbol, marriage should reflect this Divine pattern.

We have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter among other things that there is an ontological structure, which forms the basis for the formal and material structure of marriage, and that this ontological structure is the nature and inner reality of the Triune God. This inner reality of the Triune God gives marriage a normative structure, and this normative structure of marriage is grounded in and arises from this ontological base. Because of this spiritual truth, the Scriptures are justified to use (and ought to use) marriage to reflect God's love, the very nature of God.

Some might argue that marriage love is human love, and that we are confusing God's love which is divine with human love. How valid is it to use human love to speak of God's love, in this case, in marriage? But that is precisely the point of symbolism – something else is used to convey a different reality. Thus, in marriage, human love is being employed to convey God's love, the very nature of God.

Those whose mind still has difficulty apprehending the spiritual truth articulated herein, the words of Andrew Murray are apt at this point: "There is always the danger, when one attempts to explain divine mysteries in human words, of leading souls away from the one thing that can bring blessing to them, waiting on God for [God's] Spirit to reveal these truths."<sup>93</sup> To such persons and to those who would be skeptical of the

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<sup>92</sup>Eph. 5:24-32

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Murray. *The Blood of the Cross* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981). Preface.

spiritual truth set forth herein regarding marriage, ask God's Spirit to make the truth known to you. Wait for that illumination and wait patiently.

## THE MARRIAGE SYMBOL: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an attempt to consider symbols from a sociological perspective – the design and its significance and the primary functions of symbols in a group and relate same to the subject under discussion. Here, the emphasis will be on the social aspect of symbols. Where we find it appropriate, some of the same points raised in the previous chapter will also feature here. In essence, this is a restatement of the previous chapter from a sociological point of view. Even though this is a theological work, we see the need to bring in the sociological aspect of symbols. We do not want to be accused of presenting a theological conception of marriage with no correlation to social reality. It is needless to say marriage takes place on earth. What is the reality on the ground?

Marriage as a symbol has been considered with respect to the nature and inner life of God. Some may be curious: How do the basic and primary social functions of symbols comport with homosexual marriage? Or, if we were to assess homosexual marriage in light of the primary social functions of symbols, how would it measure up? In fact, is marriage a social symbol? Does traditional marriage fulfill the primary social function of symbols? We take up this issue now.

#### SYMBOL: DESIGN AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Flag is a very familiar symbol. Just as the flag of a country is a national symbol in the community of nations, so marriage is a spiritual symbol of love in the human community from the Christian perspective. This is so insofar as from the Christian perspective, the very nature of God is love. The flag is meant to convey special meaning and significance. It primarily represents the country. The flag is normally made of cloth with certain design, which includes the color combination and other elements. This feature, namely, the design essentially defines the flag of the nation. The specific design is intended to convey certain meaning and reality regarding that nation.

Simply bringing together the elements in the flag along with some of the colors does not make it the flag of that country. It must have a specific design into which *all* these elements along with the colors fit, in order to constitute the flag of the particular nation. This is because the design of the flag makes it what it is and conveys a specific meaning, and distinguishes it from flags of other nations or ordinary cloth. Thus, two nations may have flags made of the identical colors; however, the design of each flag tells which flag belongs to which country and conveys the specific meaning for each country. This same point can be made in a different way. Take the flag of the United States of

America, which is the national symbol of this country. During its existence, this country has undergone changes in terms of the number of states that make up this Union. Each time a state has been added, a change has taken place in the flag to reflect this change in the reality called the United States of America. This is so because, again, the flag symbolizes the reality which is the United States of America. One of the fundamental differences between signs and symbols is that symbols participate in the reality they symbolize, thus there is an intimate connection between symbols and the reality they symbolize. It follows that to alter a symbol is in essence to effect a change in the reality represented by that symbol. Another important consideration regarding symbols is that they cannot “be replaced for reasons of expediency or [convenience].”<sup>94</sup>

Let us relate this to marriage as a symbol. There are various kinds of human relationships in human society. We have mother-son relationship, brother-sister relationship, sister-sister, aunt-niece relationship, and husband-wife relationship, just to name a few. What formally distinguishes the marriage relationship is the specific design or structure of that relationship. **There is a divine design to marriage. And that divine design is indispensable to defining marriage.** Just as the specific design of the flag is indispensable to defining that flag, so too the specific design of the human relationship defines the marriage. The marriage design is intended to convey certain meaning. It represents the very nature of God, which is *love*. And the nature of God has an internal structure or pattern to it; so marriage has a divine pattern. Sociologically, love cannot be expressed in any way in society; there are morally appropriate ways to do that. So too the love of God cannot be expressed in any way in the Christian sense. *There is a*

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<sup>94</sup> Paul Tillich, “Symbols of Faith” in Ronald E. Santoni, ed., *Religious Language and the Problem of Religious Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 136-137.

*particular design we ought to follow in expressing that love in marriage in order to truly and authentically represent the nature of God – namely, the pattern of distinction, differentiation and equality as expressed in the internal life of the Godhead, and articulated in the Genesis account of creation, setting forth the institution of marriage therewith.* We human beings are created in the image of God. The marriage symbol conveys that truth in the human community. We are image-bearers of the Almighty God. To change the symbol means there has been a change in the reality the symbol represents. If, however, there is not a change in that reality, then the symbol becomes a distortion of the reality the symbol represents. In a much more profound sense, change in the symbol is in effect change in the nature of the reality represented by that symbol.

#### FUNCTION OF THE MARRIAGE STRUCTURE

The marriage structure institutionalizes human society as male and female. The human community is constituted by female and male, the marriage symbol conveys in the most obvious way. Marriage institutionalizes the human person as sexual being in community with other persons and makes procreation possible. Marriage gives social order to the reality that we human beings are male and female. The marriage institution provides general guidelines regarding how we are to relate as sexual, moral beings in community by setting off some relationships beyond marital bounds. As an example, a son does not get married to his unmarried mother; neither does the daughter get married to her unmarried father, nor to her brother as much as they may love each other.

Marriage is the foundation of the family, which in turn is the bedrock of society. The human society properly construed is made of male and female. The home or family constituted by marriage is the microcosm of human society. As such, the family

constituted by marriage should in essence be reflective of the fundamental elements of the society – male and female.

Besides what we have already articulated, the male/female coupling in marriage as a symbol conveys other ideas. *It expresses complementarity in marriage and the expression of sexual love. It provides the appropriate structure, order, and the proper form in the expression of sexual love and the act. Thus, there are guidelines, limitations, and boundaries in society for the expression of sexual love.* Finally, as already stated, **there is a higher, greater divine purpose for this male/female coupling in marriage; it is to serve as a symbol of the sacredness of human life, and the oneness of the human race.** As a symbol, the marriage structure has an intrinsic and logical connection to that which it symbolizes.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF MARRIAGE SYMBOLISM

Marriage, in the Christian context, communicates that the two persons are in love and have decided to spend their lives together. Sociologically, marriage conveys that human life is not just about me; it is about us, thus the communal and corporate nature of human life. The decisions I make are not just about me, but also about others. What I do or do not do affects other people. The responsibility of the human person extends beyond the individual, the marriage symbol conveys. *In short humanity is shared existence and thus shared responsibility, marriage unmistakably communicates.* Married people who forget this or ignore it soon realize.

#### FUNCTIONS OF SYMBOLS

One of the primary social functions of symbols is the preservation of the group.<sup>95</sup> It is very evident how the marriage symbol constituted by the male and female

relationship preserves the human race through procreation. Homosexual marriage as a symbol fails in performing this primary function in human society. If homosexual marriage had been the norm, the human species would have long been extinct. By obliterating the male-female structure in marriage, homosexual marriage does away with this fundamental function of the marriage symbol. Besides, by severing the connection between gender and terms such as husband and wife, and other familial terms derived there from, e.g. sister, brother, uncle, aunt, homosexual marriage conveys the message that there is no human relationship out of bounds for the expression of sexual love. What primarily matters is love or sexual attraction between any two persons. These two could be brother and sister, sister and sister, mother and son. Once they genuinely love each other that is all that matters. They can get married. In the world of homosexual marriage symbolism, these terms practically no longer exist. This is so because gender no more plays any role in marriage and the expression of sexual love, which gender is the basis for these terms. Here, there are no guidelines for the expression of sexual attraction or love between any two persons. Moreover, there is utter gender confusion and disharmony in society among human beings in relating as sexual beings. Here, homosexual marriage does away with the second primary social function of symbols, namely, the maintenance of harmony in a group, in this case, human beings as sexual beings.<sup>96</sup>

Let us grant as some might argue that in homosexual marriage, we simply have a different structure or arrangement; there are still genders. In some homosexual marriages the arrangements are such that we may have two wives, two husbands; or in one case the

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<sup>95</sup> F.C. Barlett (1925), "The Social Function of Symbols" in *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, 3:1-11.

<sup>96</sup> F.C. Barlett (1925), "The Social Function of Symbols: *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, 3:1-11

wife may be a female, in another marriage we may have a male as the wife. The result is the same – utter linguistic confusion and disharmony in the society in relating as sexual beings. We do not know if a woman is married to a husband or another wife; or if the husband is male or female. This kind of confusion regarding roles in the marriage and family, in this case, motherhood, is being played out in a court case originating in Florida, USA, now before the Supreme Court in Australia, where a child has two mothers in a “marriage union.” The case involves a lesbian couple, now separated, each claiming to be the mother of an eight year-old girl. One of the ladies donated the egg that was implanted in the other lady. The US court states the biological mother, the one who donated the egg, is the mother, while a lower court in Australia has decided for the birth mother as the mother. What does motherhood mean in this union?

Here, homosexual marriage fails to bring about social, linguistic, sexual harmony; rather, discord reigns. Either way, homosexual marriage fails as a symbol in maintaining harmony in human society in this respect. If language communicates meaning and the reality about our world, then the linguistic confusion created by homosexual marriage is a creation of confusion regarding this social reality and meaning in human community.

The third primary social function of symbols is the transmission of the culture to future generations.<sup>97</sup> Since homosexual marriage cannot formally procreate, there are no future generations, hence no future for humanity, and no progeny or offspring from homosexual marriage to pass on the culture to succeeding generations. We see how heterosexual marriage carries on this function through procreation. On all three counts, i.e. the fundamental functions of symbols, namely, *the preservation of the society, the maintenance of harmony or order (in this case in relating as sexual beings), and the*

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

*transmission of the culture to future generations*, the homosexual marriage fails as a symbol.

## GENDER AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

A careful look at the family relationships in our earlier examples indicates a common thread: They are all gender related. When you call someone aunt, you know the person is a female. When you speak of uncle, the person is a male. One's sister is a female, and one's brother is a male. We carefully chose examples of the relationships somehow connected, in one way or another, to the family brought into existence by the marriage structure, or that can be traced ultimately to the marital relationship. The terms *husband* and *wife* are linked to the genders in the marriage, hence, the gender relationship in the terms above. The advocates of homosexual marriage are severing the gender connections to these terms. In homosexual marriage, we no longer know if the "husband" is a male or a female. In some cases a husband may be another female, or the wife may be a male – utter linguistic confusion. In fact, in some homosexual marriages there are no husbands or wives. So in the homosexual marriage world, you do not know if you are talking about a male or a female when you are talking about a person's wife. Or, if the person claims to be married, you do not know if there is any wife or husband in the union. If language ought to communicate meaning about reality, homosexual marriage is creating distortion of reality by such linguistic confusion. This elementary question may be asked: How are the human relationships derived from the family brought into being by the marriage gender related, but the marriage structure itself is no longer gender related? Logically, this makes no sense. Advocates of homosexual marriage are therefore advocating the distortion of human biological and social reality without knowing.

This brief presentation indicates that, in light of the primary social functions of symbols, marriage in the normative sense is a symbol and thus functions or fulfills the role of symbol in society. However, this is not true in the case of homosexual marriage: it fails all three primary social functions of symbol in human society. This sociological perspective also corroborates the theological conception of marriage as a symbol earlier presented.

## HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE: A CHRISTIAN OPTION?

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the symbolization of the Divine image of the Triune God in human existence, namely personal life as fellowship in unity. One basic purpose of symbol is to integrate the various elements and apparent distinctions among things and express some profound truth, which may not necessarily be obvious. In this respect, marriage as a symbol integrates the various elements of human beings as male and female and expresses the oneness of human beings and thus the equality of the genders in this symbolic significance. And most profoundly, the marriage symbol conveys that human life is sacred in that it is grounded in God who is Love, and human beings participate in that life of Divine Love.<sup>98</sup>

Now, we are in the position to evaluate homosexual marriage in light of the spiritual and theological truth set forth regarding marriage.

### HOW DOES HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE FARE AS A SPIRITUAL SYMBOL?

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<sup>98</sup> Acts 17:28

*Homosexual marriage fails formally as a Divine symbol in human existence. In the first place, it does not bring together or unite the basic distinctive elements of humanity, namely the male and female, which pulling together or integration is the fundamental function of the symbol. Since marriage is a Divine symbol and symbol functions in pulling together the basic distinctive elements, in this case of humanity, and “deriving its meaning chiefly from the structure in which it appears,” it goes to say that marriage as a symbol is constituted materially and theologically by the male and female union in holy wedlock; for these are the distinct elements. Homosexual marriage is analogous to constructing the national flag, the symbol of the nation, formally composed of two different colors with only one of these colors repeated, and claiming it is an authentic flag of that nation.*

*Secondly, homosexual marriage distorts symbolically the eternal distinction and role in the Godhead by making no existential distinction between the sexes and the role that goes with being husband and wife in the family created by the marriage union, namely, father and mother, especially so in the procreative function. In marriage, we have husband and wife. Translated in the family context, they become father and mother. Such distinction and role are linked to human existence as male and female in the order of creation; but homosexual marriage obscures such distinction and role and severs the link to human beings as male and female. The familial relationships expressed by terms such as father, mother, brother, sister, nephew, niece, aunt and uncle are based on the formal structure of the male-female relationship in marriage. Homosexual marriage renders these terms vacuous.*

The practical consequence of homosexual marriage is that it obliterates the existential symbolism of the ontological distinction in the triune life of God in human existence, by attacking and doing away with the formal structure of marriage, which is integral to the order of creation. By so doing, homosexual marriage provides no pointer to any ontological underpinning regarding how the sexes are to relate to each other in

different social contexts. It therefore opens a floodgate for all kinds of sexual relationships with no regard to the social context and propriety, by ignoring the formal biological structure in human existence for the proper expression of sexual love. Existentially, homosexual marriage cannot formally perpetuate the human species in this kind of marriage.

Allowing homosexual marriage as a Christian option is analogous to telling motorists on a two-lane highway they may drive on any lane they so desire and feel like. One can readily see what situation it would create on a highway. On the moral highway of life, homosexual marriage creates similar analogous confusion and disaster, *for it provides no moral guidelines for persons who are sexually attracted to each other*. It does not say what is not morally permissible. All that matters is the sexual attraction or love between the two persons. Human beings as spiritual beings ought to be controlled by much more than their natural instincts and impulses. When human beings are controlled primarily by their natural instincts and impulses, such way of life tends to undermine their divine purpose in life.

*The acceptance of this form of marriage provides no solid theological ground for asserting that any kind of human relationship is inappropriate and morally wrong for marital relationship, for all that matters is the love or sexual attraction between any two persons.* Homosexual marriage is a "symbolic confusion" because it distorts an important existential symbol in human community. Symbols, we are told by Sociologists, create social reality and order our life and world of meaning. Human beings by virtue of being social beings need social reality, which provides the context and concrete structure for proper interaction and meaning. The distortion of symbols, especially religious symbols, thus creates distorted theological reality and confusion in our world of religious meaning and meaningful discourse. *In the case of homosexual marriage, one basic symbolic confusion of meaning is that it conveys there are no inappropriate human relationships, morally wrong for the sexual expression of love.*

What matters most is whether or not the two persons have natural sexual attraction or love for each other as the basis for such expression of love. And most importantly, homosexual marriage distorts and corrupts the spiritual reality conveyed by the marriage symbol, namely, Divine love, which is the nature of God.

We can readily see the logical ramifications of this basis of relating as sexual beings. A man could get married to his mother or daughter because of natural sexual attraction or love, for this is the basic foundation or criterion for supporting homosexual marriage: natural love between two persons; it does not matter who the two persons happen to be. In the case of homosexual marriage, it just happens to be that they are of the same gender. Since the familial relationships linked by the male-female relationship in marriage has been severed, there is no longer any enduring structure to guide the sexual drive in these familial relationships, as the terms expressing these relationships have been rendered meaningless in homosexual symbolism.

Thirdly, as medium of communication by virtue as a symbol, *homosexual marriage conveys a unisex human society*, which is not after all, true to the social and biological reality of human existence. Since the symbol functions to integrate the distinctive elements of a thing, in this case, the human being, it means marriage as a symbol, ought to bring together the distinctive elements of humanity as male and female. However, homosexual marriage fails to do that. In its failure to do that, homosexual marriage communicates a distorted reality regarding humanity and how human beings actually live out their lives in the world.

*Moreover, it confuses human love for each other with the proper sexual expression of such love distinctive of the marital relationship, which union is constituted formally by the male-female relationship.* "The fundamental order of creation and the

created determination of the two sexes make it appear justifiable to speak of homosexual [marriage] as a [distortion of marriage in the theological sense that] is in every case not in accord with the order of creation"<sup>99</sup> and marriage as symbol.

Forms bring order and stability. Creation was first a formless mass with chaos raging all over it. The Spirit of God brought form and order. Marriage brings social form and order to human beings as sexual beings. Homosexual marriage breaks down this social order and form. Husband and wife which are linguistic and social expressions associated with the distinct and definite genders of human beings as sexual beings are now without definite stable sexual form in homosexual marriage. In one situation, the wife is a female; in another situation the wife is a male. In another marriage, there is no husband or wife; there is now no stable form. We no longer know in homosexual marriage whether the husband is a male or whether the wife is a female. It depends on which couple you talk to. This leads to confusion in language. Symbol is in the realm of communication, we should remember. *Homosexual marriage conveys the idea that there is no human relationship out of bound for the expression of sexual love.*

*The acceptance of homosexual marriage creates confusion in our world of meaningful discourse.* For example, the word father or mother would lack any fundamental meaning linked to the structure of human existence as male and female for a child reared in such a marital context. This confusion in our world of meaningful discourse was years ago highlighted in a popular magazine, Newsweek.<sup>100</sup> The magazine featured a homosexual (same sex) couple with their six-year-old adopted son. The son was asked to identify one of his parents and he responded by saying, "that's my dad's husband." What precisely does that mean? Dad should have a wife and not a husband! Or better still, which one is the dad? The magazine then stated this kind of problem

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<sup>99</sup>Helmut Thielicke, "The Theologicoethical Aspect of Homosexuality" in Homosexuality and Ethics, Edward Batchelor (ed.) (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1980), 100.

<sup>100</sup>March 12, 1990, 25.

raised by asserting mildly that such a marriage "can lead to some difficult moment."

What is an example of such difficulties? James M. Henslin, a renowned sociologist says that:

The world can be structured in many ways, and the language we learn as children channels our thinking into particular structure. Language is not a cloak following the contours of thought, but language is a mold into which infant minds are poured.<sup>101</sup>

Another sociologist puts it this way, "without language, all but the most rudimentary forms of thought are impossible . . . language enables us to give meaning to the world."<sup>102</sup> To be very blunt is to say we think with words.

"Language causes people to conceptualize nature and the world in different ways." Our conception may be a distortion of reality depending on the language we develop, or it may be a relative adequate conception of reality.<sup>103</sup> With language, "we can think logically . . ."<sup>104</sup> If the assessment of Sociology is correct concerning the significance of language with respect to our apprehension of meaning and reality, then homosexual marriage poses a fundamental problem of meaning and reality regarding human beings by the distortion of our world of meaningful discourse at a very fundamental level of existence by creating linguistic confusion illustrated by Newsweek at such a fundamental level of existence within the family. *If language is basic and essential to clear thinking and conveying meaning and reality, then the distortion and confusion of language created by homosexual marriage at such a deeper and elemental level of existence for a child is a distortion and confusion of what language conveys: meaning and reality.*

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<sup>101</sup>James M. Henslin, Introducing Sociology (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 68.

<sup>102</sup>Jon Robertson, Sociology (New York: Worth Publishers, 1977), 70.

<sup>103</sup>Elbert W. Stewart, Sociology (New York: The McGraw Hill Book Company, 1981), 78.

<sup>104</sup>Robertson, 70.

*And perhaps most important of all, homosexual marriage goes against the Divine will of God. It is thus in effect an assault on God and the sovereignty of God.*

Homosexual marriage asserts certain truths though. One truth expressed by homosexual marriage is that relationship is fundamental to human existence, and that sexuality is integral to the being that is human. Another truth is love is central to marriage. The bold declaration by homosexual marriage symbolism that there is no normative structure for the expression of conjugal love is the untruth of homosexual marriage. Another untruth conveyed by homosexual marriage is that there is no human relationship out of bounds where marriage is concerned. *Just because any two persons are attracted to each other, love each other and want to spend the rest of their lives in a committed relationship, and they come together and thus constitute a marriage is the untruth of homosexual marriage. Proponents of homosexual marriage fail to see that marriage conveys certain reality in a concrete tangible way, "deriving it meaning... from the structure in which it appears."* The symbolic statement by homosexual marriage is that the love of God can be expressed in just any kind of way. Stated another way, the love of God can be expressed irrespective of the will of God. This is sadly untrue!

#### WHAT IS WRONG WITH HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE?

There is a lot wrong with homosexual union. We have alluded to many of them in this essay, and other authors have pointed out some of the same things. Here, we will emphasize just three.

#### SIN

Homosexual marriage (not homosexual orientation per se) is a sin. It violates and tramples upon the sovereignty of God who alone has the prerogative to structure creation in ways to reflect the glory of God. In this sense homosexual marriage is an assault on the sovereignty of God. Marriage was instituted of God after a definite pattern and for specific purpose. That pattern is the very nature of God (love) and the inner attribute of

God (namely, distinction, differentiation and equality in the Godhead). *Marriage is a spiritual symbol; and as such, its meaning is defined by the structure in which it appears.* If marriage is a symbol of Divine love, which love is the very nature of God, it goes to say to distort that symbol is in effect to distort that which the symbol represents, and thus an attack on the very nature of God. God created human being in the image of God. Homosexual marriage is a symbolic attempt to make God in the image of human being, and thus create a domesticated God, which God is there to do the bidding of human being. Stated in a different way, to change the marriage symbol as Christian advocates are calling for, in the case of homosexual marriage, is in effect to make the nature and character of God (the reality of God) subject to human whims and desires.

Some of the same Christians who are morally outraged when others show total disregard for the environment by how these others use it, fail to see how homosexual marriage is equally a total disregard for God's order of creation. These others are putting marriage to the kind of use that flaunts God's divine will. When creation is put to such use not in accordance with God's divine purpose and will, it dishonors the creator and diminishes the glory of God.

#### THE WRONG MESSAGE

Homosexual marriage as a symbol conveys the wrong message to Christian individuals in society. Symbols, we should recall, are in the realm of communication. **Homosexual marriage communicates the singular message that there are no human relationships out of bounds for the institution of marriage.** The only legitimate criterion for marriage between any two persons is whether the two are in love with each other. Once they are, no other considerations are required; they can get married. They could be brother and sister, brother and brother, mother and son, sister and sister, father and daughter; they have the green light. There is no restriction. Homosexual marriage is here stressing one aspect of truth at the expense of another aspect of the truth. The truth being over-stressed by the advocates of homosexual union is *love*. They are stressing that

at the expense of the proper means, or the proper human relationship in which to express marital love. *They are thus discounting other valid considerations for marriage.* The structure of marriage, a very valid consideration, for example, is now being determined by those in love. The implication of this kind of action may lead to all kinds of marriage arrangements--the kind of marriage structures we mentioned above. *Advocates of homosexual marriage overlook the fact that Christian love cannot be expressed outside the will of God.* While there are various legitimate ways to express God's love, there are also proper means to express God's love depending on the various kinds of human relationships. **The kind of relationship is essential at times in defining love itself.**

While we are not here equating the sexual act with love, it should be said that the sexual act, properly understood from the Christian perspective, is one valid expression of conjugal love. It should also be said that while there are many valid ways to express love in society, any expression of love is not necessarily Christian love, just because a Christian claims it is an expression of Christian love. A man having consensual sexual intimacy with his mother is not a morally valid expression of Christian love in this relationship, no matter if they claim they love each other and are married. By ignoring other considerations for marriage, advocates for homosexual marriage in principle make such marriage between a man and his mother a distinct and valid possibility. A man and his daughter who are genuinely in love cannot morally enter into Christian holy wedlock, and neither can the mother and daughter do the same. Because marriage is a symbol, it communicates by its very structure. The presence of homosexual marriage in society conveys that there is no improper human relationship for marriage as long as the love is genuine. *We respectfully disagree.* There are proper human relationships for the institution of marriage as far as Christians are concerned. Some human relationships are off limits for the institution of Christian marriage. We do not get married to our mother or brother no matter how genuine the love is. And neither do we get married to another person of the same gender as we are because of the symbolic nature of marriage.

From the incarnational point of view, and for the reasons earlier articulated in the context of the symbolic nature of marriage, homosexual marriage is not a valid Christian (divine) symbol. ***Homosexual marriage communicates that Christians can express the love of God outside the will of God.*** Once it is genuine love, the advocates of homosexual marriage say in essence, the will of God is irrelevant because God is LOVE. If we define love basically as a kind of relationship (see Jesus' interpretation and summary of the Decalogue), we see the error here. Not every genuine love relationship in society is necessarily an expression of love in the Christian sense. *The point is any expression of love apart from the will of God is no more Christian love. It lacks the essential ingredient or quality of being an expression of God's love, and therefore cannot be called love in the Christian sense.*

Symbols communicate by the structures in which they appear, it should be reiterated. ***Stated differently, homosexual marriage conveys that we Christians can rightly and properly use our freedom to do anything we please irrespective of the will of God.*** The question then becomes, is that use of our freedom legitimate and proper? While we humans may freely choose to use our freedom in anyway we so desire, any use of our freedom is not necessarily a legitimate and proper use of our freedom as far as the Christian faith is concerned. Our freedom as Christians cannot rightly and properly be used to do anything we please irrespective of the will of God, or to portray the nature and character of God in any way we so choose. Indeed, we Christians do not (and cannot) define the nature of God. That nature is revealed to us. So too is that which is the symbol of the divine image! Homosexual marriage as a symbol in essence conveys that we can use our freedom to define the nature of God, and anyway we define it is valid.

#### UNTRUTH

The untruth being promulgated sadly by advocates of homosexual marriage is there is no definite, divine pattern to be found in Scriptures, no ontological underpinning for the traditional marriage structure. They assert tacitly that God's love can be expressed

in any way; in this case, marriage is whatever any two persons in love want the human relationship structure to be. Stated another way, the love of God can be expressed outside the will of God. This is categorically untrue. The institution of marriage is not a human invention; it is integral to the order of creation and therefore is of divine origin. As such, God had a definite pattern for it. That pattern has already been set forth.

### WHAT SHOULD THE CHURCH DO?

The church as a community of believers needs to seek the face of the Lord in earnest prayer in how best to respond to this issue. The church needs to seek God's face in earnest, fervent prayer for *understanding, illumination, and guidance* through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the meanwhile, local congregations should be educated in relating to homosexuals and homosexual couples in loving and affirming ways. For these too are created in God's image. Besides, we are all sinners, and God still loves us. **We too should love all people sincerely, including Gays and Lesbians! Jesus' relationship to people of his day, including prostitutes and adulterers, becomes paradigmatic for the church in this matter.**

Considering Jesus' attitude of love and concern towards the despised of society and adulterers of his day, the latter who in Jewish society were liable to death by stoning, there is no doubt, Jesus would also show love and compassion for the homosexual couples. That would not necessarily mean, however, an endorsement of their lifestyle such as homosexual marriage. Even as Jesus showed love and compassion for prostitutes and the adulterers but did not endorse their lifestyle or conduct, we Christians today

should make the same distinction with homosexual couples. Some of the most incisive criticisms leveled at Jesus were due to his affirming and caring relationship with the sinners and despised. We, as the church, should show love, compassion and affirm these persons, for they too are God's children. However, we should *not* accept homosexual marriage as a valid Christian option for the reasons already given. We should be reminded that we do not have to accept what a person does or one's lifestyle to love the person. Parents do that most of the time. On the other hand, to love the person does not mean to accept the sin of the person, and neither does it mean to condemn. We should leave judgment up to God. In addition, we are all sinners! God loves us but does not accept our sin. *It needs to be asserted that homosexual orientation per se is not sin; it is the practice such as homosexual marriage is where the sin lies. This distinction is very important here.*

We should also address the failure of normal marriage here. Heterosexual marriage has failed often in being *the symbol of true love*. While there is the form, in many heterosexual marriages, the substance is missing: there is betrayal, infidelity and cruelty. Sin, it seems has done great havoc! Some Christian men subjugate their wives, treating them at times as chattel. And some of these men quote the Scriptures to justify their action – they fail to realize the subjugation is remnant of the curse in Genesis 3, which Christ has done away with. In Christ, all are one, i.e., equal. Differences in role in the marriage do not make one gender a chattel or property, and the other property owner. We are created to “submit one to another [in marriage] out of reverence for Christ” in spite of the male being the head – a realization that the role of the male does not free him from submitting to the wife, or give him license to subjugate the female if he is truly

Christ's follower.<sup>105</sup> In light of this failure of normal marriage, *homosexual marriage is, from the signs of the times, an indictment of the institution of marriage in the church.* Marriage in the Christian community has not often been exemplary; it has left much to be desired.<sup>106</sup>

One may argue from what has just been said that both heterosexual couples and homosexual couples are in the same boat, because they both deviate from God's pattern and therefore are equally sinners. That is indeed true. There is difference, however. The difference is proponents of homosexual marriage claim that homosexual marriage is an authentic expression of God's design for marriage. They convey by their actions that the love of God can be expressed outside the will of God- a failure to recognize that the form of expression of love is at times critical to defining Christian love depending on the context. Citing an earlier example, a man expressing his love for his wife through coition is one thing. Using that same means to express his love for his children carries a totally different meaning.

All persons (be it heterosexual or homosexual) who for one reason or another do not get married are called to make sacrifice for the Kingdom of God. For the homosexual as well as heterosexual it means a call to singleness and celibacy. This is a valid Christian option and a taking up of one's cross for Christ. This is not easy. This is why it is a sacrifice.

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<sup>105</sup> Ephesians 5: 21-33; Genesis 3: 14-19

<sup>106</sup> A recent survey by Barna Group showed that in some Christian groups, the divorce rate was much higher than the general population in the United States of America. Instead of Christian leaders dealing with the real issue, or the substance of the study, they were questioning the Barna Group's definition of "Evangelical Christian." The Barna Group's definition – one who has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and made commitment to him for one's salvation – may not be an adequate definition of an Evangelical Christian, but that is what it means to be a Christian. Non-believers would care less about the difference in terms of the witness of the church. It was seriously disappointing by the focus of these Christian leaders. They should have been striving to *know* the reason, and how the church could nurture exemplary marriages. Rather, they were concerned to show that *their particular Christian group* did not have such bad a divorce rate.

# ADDRESSING SOME ALLEGATIONS AND ARGUMENTS

## THE CLAIM OF INJUSTICE

We will now address some allegations and arguments put forth by proponents of homosexual marriage. Let us begin with the issue of injustice alleged by the advocates of homosexual marriage because society or the church refuses to allow homosexual marriage. The first and foremost rebuttal to such allegation is that in the Christian context, word such as injustice has no valid Christian meaning and basis outside of the will of God. If it can be shown that homosexual marriage is contrary to the will of God, then the issue of injustice does not arise when the church does not permit such a practice.

A secondary rebuttal is this. If the church allows anyone to get married to whomever one falls in love with, with no limitation or restriction regarding gender, or the kind of relationship, what justification is there to stop marital union in other distinctions or relationships, if the two persons involved are genuinely in love? Do we now disregard incest law since the two persons, say a brother and his sister, claim they are madly and genuinely in love and want to get married? Do we do away with law against polygamy if those involved truly love each other? Would stopping these not be injustice? The point is advocates of homosexual marriage in essence want no restriction with respect to the

fundamental issue of gender in this matter. Since the basic structure of marriage is the male-female paradigm, a sister and brother relationship fits the bill, some might argue. What would be logically inconsistent in allowing a male getting married to his sister when the fundamental distinction in the human species is no more a consideration for marriage? It should be reiterated that all family relationships are based on the male-female paradigm in marriage. When this fundamental distinction is obliterated in the marriage union, all other relationships based on this basic relationship practically no longer exist, and can no longer serve as limitation or restriction for marriage. When this fundamental distinction as male and female in the human society is categorically ignored in the marriage institution, what other distinctions can possibly withstand the weight of the argument that has led to the dissolution of this fundamental distinction in marriage?

#### GENDER, EQUALITY, AND MARRIAGE

One rationale put forth by the advocates of homosexual marriage is that of equality of the sexes. They reason that since equality is now recognized between the genders, and the male can get married to the female, the male or female should also be able to get married to person of one's own gender. Here, one implication of equality is doing away with distinct roles in marriage, and bringing into being interchangeable roles in the marriage relationship. But how valid is this implication? Let us inquire, just because the male and female are equal in the eyes of God or the law, does it follow that the male in the marital relationship should be able to get pregnant and give birth to a child? The point is equality does not necessarily mean doing away with distinct roles in the marital relationship. The male cannot be the wife in the marriage, and neither can the female be the husband in the marriage. One may argue that having children is not the

primary reason for marriage; or, that the couple may not want a child in the marriage. Be that as it may, it does not follow that the formal God-ordained structure of marriage should be changed to accommodate human desires and constructs. Equality of the genders, which we have already alluded to as conveyed by marriage symbolism, does not do away with the ontological foundation of marriage we have set forth.

Equality of the genders does not do away with gender differences. What equality does is to assert emphatically that we cannot use these differences as basis for unfair treatment. Equality does not do away with morality in society; it asserts a morality that maximizes the good of all the genders, and not one gender to the exclusion of the other gender. Equality does not do away with distinctive gender roles ontologically linked to the order of creation. *Equality asserts emphatically that these distinctive roles are to be equally valued by society.*

#### REBUTTAL TO THE “NATURAL” STANDARD ARGUMENT

We take up the “natural” argument at this point. Love as romantic passion is very strong, and sometimes irrational. As such, it must be controlled or structured by society in some sense; if not, it can do serious harm to social relationships. *“Love that is not controlled breaks all moral conventions.”* Human beings as sexual beings are created to be attracted *naturally* to persons of the opposite gender in the adult stage. Even though this is *natural*, some controls are in place because we are also moral beings. Acting out some of these *natural* attractions would be morally wrong. Some of these controls are not getting married to one’s sibling or one’s mother. There are some, though few, cases where some individuals have romantic attraction towards one’s sibling of the opposite

gender.<sup>107</sup> Using the reasoning of the advocates for homosexual marriage, it could be said that for such persons, this is “natural” because we human beings are created to be sexually attracted to persons of the opposite gender. In this case, the other person of the opposite gender just happens to be one’s sibling. Let us grant that in the case of homosexuals, sexual attraction toward one of the same gender is “natural.” Should society therefore allow these two kinds of romantic relationships just because in each case, it is “natural,” and the two persons involved in each case are truly in love with each other? Using the “natural” argument, these kinds of relationships must be allowed. In the case of the heterosexual, the other just happens to be one’s sibling; whereas, in the case of the homosexual, the other person just happens to be of the same gender. “Natural” is now being used as the standard society should employ in deciding the marital relationship. Here, we see that the “natural” standard is as strong as it is weak.

#### BASING MORALITY ON SCIENCE

Some advocates of homosexual marriage appeal to the Science of Genetics to support their position. It must be asserted that Christian morality is not ultimately grounded in Science but rather in the nature and character of God who has been disclosed in Jesus the Christ. To be sure, some Christian morality may change at times, but not the foundation of Christian morality. The change is often due to better understanding of Scriptures or God, but not that God has changed to cause change in our understanding. Those who appeal to Science as the underpinning for the moral rectitude of homosexual marriage need to do a much better job. The conclusions of Science are always in the nature of this undertaking tentative. While these conclusions do help us clarify issues,

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<sup>107</sup> In II Samuel 13: 1f, we have one such case in the Scriptures. Amnon is in love with his sister Tamar, even though she is not. When Amnon acted out his sexual attraction, it led to grave consequences, including his death.

they are not however the enduring foundation of Christian morality. Besides, while Science may uncover *what is* the state of affairs or condition, Science cannot however, determine *what ought to be or the moral quality of what is*. Stated differently, when Science uncovers *what is*, Society must still decide *the morality of what is*. The revelation of God in Christ Jesus discloses that at its very core, something is fundamentally flawed with *what is*, in particular, humanity. Therefore, just because something *is* according to Science *does not mean it ought to be that way*. To base Christian morality on the foundation of Science is to ground morality in shifting sand. We must look elsewhere for such foundation. That foundation is the revelation of God as disclosed in Jesus Christ as far as the Christian community is concerned. And the Scriptures are the depository of that revelation.

#### The TRUTH vs “truths”

One of the seemingly persuasive arguments is that no one individual Christian or group has the whole TRUTH. What “truth” we each know is simply a facet of the TRUTH. All these facets of the TRUTH, affirmed and appropriated, contribute to the TRUTH, as each facet infuses our Christian symbols, thus giving us deeper insights into “the great mysteries of God.” Therefore, we should affirm, or, at the least, not reject these other views as facets of the TRUTH just because we disagree with them. From this argument, homosexual marriage should be affirmed, or, at the least, not be rejected as facet of the TRUTH.

Such is a powerful argument and has much to commend it. As we have prayerfully and earnestly considered this weighty argument and sought the wisdom of God, it has become very clear to us that this argument is essentially a refined statement of

our earlier position for which the Lord had told us to reconsider. The point is just because what “truth” a believer holds is partial, it does not follow that every conviction or belief held by every Christian individual or group is indeed, actually a facet of the TRUTH. Therein comes the criterion of validity. By what criterion does the community of faith assess and evaluate every held position or belief of a significant segment of the Christian community as a facet of the Christian TRUTH? It is here that the issue of the ultimate Christian authority comes into play. That ultimate Christian authority becomes the criterion for validity, yes, the legitimacy of such position held by the group (See chapters one and two for discussion on that).

#### POSSIBLE CRITICISM

One possible critique of the present work is the lack of discussion of civil union as a viable alternative to marriage as some churches have allowed. One reason for this exclusion is civil union is not the same as marriage in such cases. We are setting forth a theological conception of Christian marriage, and civil union according to this consideration, is excluded from such conception. Secondly, by its very name, civil union properly belongs within the purview of the civil authority. While the civil rights of persons need to be safeguarded by all including the church, it is theologically unsound to redefine Christian marriage solely on the basis of such considerations. There could well be other civil rights of individuals that could contravene the teachings of the church. Some of these rights have not even yet been created. Does this mean that in each case and every time, the church should modify its doctrinal standards or beliefs simply to

accommodate these civil rights? “Groundless [theological] adoption of policies of action is the hallmark of irresponsibility....”<sup>108</sup>

The proper stance of the church, it seems, is to respect these civil rights considerations as such, and let civil authorities deal with civil union, instead of changing the church doctrinal standards or beliefs, in this case, redefining marriage, to accommodate these civil rights considerations. For individual Christians who want to take advantage of such civil union, such decision should be left up to the individuals, and the individuals involved should be affirmed as persons of sacred worth. It should be said that marriage as an order of creation does not have to be a Christian understanding of marriage to be valid. A case in point is polygamy. In few places we have women who have more than one husband (polyandry). The former is valid in many societies; it is even found in the Bible. However, it is not accepted as a valid Christian understanding of marriage. *Thus, the validity of a form of marriage in a society does not necessarily make it a Christian marriage.* Society may adopt any form of marriage it chooses. It does not obligate the church to adopt or accept that form, especially if such form of marriage is contrary to the beliefs of the church. The church must be careful, however, not to impose its understanding on society. Herein lies the tension: The church is in society but must never adopt the lifestyle of society. **The Christian faith is in essence a peculiar way of life. That way of life quite often goes against the prevailing lifestyle of society.**

Finally, all Christians should carefully consider on the one hand what St. Paul said, “we [all] know in part and prophesy in part...for we see in a mirror, dimly...” On the other hand, we each have to be faithful to the light of illumination given to us by the Lord. In light of the illumination received at this point in our spiritual journey, civil union

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<sup>108</sup> Frederick Ferré, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967) p.19.

is not the same as marriage and should not be so considered as a valid form of Christian marriage. It does not serve as a valid symbol of the Divine image, and neither does it fulfill the functions of symbol in society as set forth in our reflection.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

Homosexual marriage needs to be viewed in the wider context of the order of creation. God has established certain order in creation with boundaries to maximize our freedom and to maintain such order. We have the natural order. We have the moral order as well as the spiritual order. We label how things ought to operate and the boundaries in these spheres as natural law, moral law, and spiritual law. When human beings go against how things ought to be and these boundaries, creation is disrupted at its very core, with profound consequences. This disruption first occurred in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve, the first human family, disregarded the boundary set in place by the creator. Humanity continues to be affected today by that fundamental disruption. The Scriptures make clear that creation is under constant threat of chaos, disorder and decay as the consequence of that initial primordial disruption. Many of the ills of human society can be traced to the disruption or violation of the spiritual, moral and natural order of creation.

Homosexual marriage is a clear and vivid manifestation of the violation and disruption of the created order in human society, which is bound to have profound consequences in human society, and needless to mention, the persons involved and their relationship to the creator. *Homosexual marriage by its very structure and symbolic significance is a challenge to human existence as male and female, and a challenge to the sovereignty of God who has put in place the formal structure of marriage, the male and female paradigm.* This is not to say individuals necessarily choose to be homosexual, anymore than individuals choose to be heterosexual. However, in the case of homosexuals, acting out this orientation as in homosexual marriage is where the moral and spiritual issue lies. On the other hand, the church should be acutely aware that many homosexuals are struggling with their sexual orientation. *Like any human being, they deserve our respect, our empathy, our love and affirmation. That does not, however, mean the acceptance of homosexual marriage lifestyle. The sin is the homosexual marriage lifestyle, not the orientation. Christians who do not make this distinction are making a grave error.*

It should be emphasized that those who are bearers of the image of God should not be purveyors of hatred and bigotry and vile language in the name of truth against those also created in that same image. Truth and hatred along with bigotry cannot co-exist. On the other hand, those who are bearers of God's image should not live by the dictates and promptings of their natural urges and pleasure and ignore God's sovereignty. Rather, they are to live according to the Spirit and seek to please God in all they do; for there is a greater calling and a greater purpose to our life, which can be seriously and

eternally compromised if we live according to the dictates and promptings of our natural instincts and our natural urges.

With respect to homosexual marriage, the church is on trial on four fronts -

1. Our treatment of those who are offensive to our moral sensibilities: be it gay or lesbian, the despised, the outcast, the homeless, the prostitute, and the poor.  
*Do we treat them with love as those also created in the image of God?*
2. Lone ranger approach to the Christian life: Such approach is having adverse effect in many ways on the Christian community – a sense of alienation and going it alone among individual Christians. The *Koinonia* of the New Testament Church in Acts is wanting. Where it exists, it is not usually inclusive. The corporate dimension of life has not been adequately lived out as exemplified by the institution of marriage. We may have greater impact on society in our day as the church by focusing on the family along with marriage, for it is the foundation of the human community. In this age of secularism the church can serve as an efficacious “leaven” in the loaf of human community by focusing on nurturing loving, godly marriages and families, thus giving rise to the *beloved community*. The impact of such focus cannot be over-emphasized. The question is do we as the church see the close connection to this issue?
3. Whether or not the love of God can be expressed irrespective of the will of God. If a certain expression of love in practice lacks the quality of the will of God, is such action still an expression of genuine Christian love?

4. Whether or not we will follow the way of the world and the forces shaping secular society, or we will follow the way of Christ. That way is narrow. **We cannot truly be faithful disciples of Christ Jesus if we are not willing to make the sacrifice, and surrender our will and pleasure, and follow Jesus Christ all the way.** This is the Challenge! And it is the challenge in every age.

## APPENDIX A

### THE INCARNATIONAL PARADIGM

The incarnation may be conceptualized as the “intersection of the universal and the particular,” the absolute and the relative.<sup>109</sup> At that point of intersection both the absolute and the relative are incorporated at that point of intersection. The incarnation articulated as the intersection of the absolute and the relative, the universal and the particular, permits us to develop a method of theological reflection with insights that come to grips with some of the weighty philosophical issues raised by “Process Thought” without the baggage that comes with embracing “Process Philosophy.” Some of these *weighty issues are being and becoming, permanence and change with respect to a discussion of the nature of the God of the Bible and ultimate reality, and the nature of Scriptures.*

The inadequacy of the formulation of the conception of the Christian God in Classical Theology handed down to us has long been exposed. This has led to efforts

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<sup>109</sup> I am indebted to the Rev. Dr. J. Philip Wogaman for this phrase, “the intersection of the universal and the particular.” Our conception has always emphasized permanence and change, the absolute and the relative dimension of the incarnation, which parallels his view. His phrase captures the essence of our conception.

such as “Process Theology.”<sup>110</sup> *The Christian God in classical thought is the immutable, changeless Being who is unaffected by human beings. But the Scriptures speak about God changing God’s mind and being influenced by the prayers of contrite hearts. Such phenomenon “Process Theology” has reminded us of and has attempted a formulation of a conception of God consistent with that disclosed in Scriptures.*

This new paradigm presented in the present work addresses some of the concerns of Process Theology in the context of historic Christianity and fidelity to that gospel without the weakness of the conception of the Christian God in “Process Thought.” The divine-human formulation of the nature of the incarnate Christ embodies being and becoming, permanence and change. We have already indicated these features. *Thus, in this new paradigm (The Incarnational Paradigm) we have a dynamic God as clearly revealed in the Bible, One who is at once the Ancient of Days. In this new paradigm, being and becoming are integral to ultimate reality.* For a more detailed presentation, the reader may see my book, *Through African Eyes: biblical parallel to African religion and culture and its implications for a new theological paradigm* (Astoria: Seaburn Publishing Group, 2009).

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<sup>110</sup> Process Theology is a recent theological development that places emphasis on change or process, and thus, the evolutionary development of humankind and the universe as we know and experience the same. This theological movement posits “of development through” God’s interaction with humankind and the universe, which is itself in the process of change.

## APPENDIX B

### AN INCARNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON SCRIPTURES

In the incarnation, one may find the basis for the theology of the Word of God. Indeed, Jesus Christ is called the Living Word of God. We are told in John 1:1, 14, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh [human] and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” *Jesus Christ*, according to this passage, *is the Word of God*. The Bible also is called the Word of God. These two statements imply that *Jesus Christ and the Bible share something in common*. It is like saying plants and animals are living things. They are both different, but they are the same in that they are living things. They are essentially of the same category (living things). Jesus Christ and the Bible can not both be called the Word of God and not share the one thing that makes them both the Word of God. *A true understanding of Scriptures as the Word of God may therefore be glimpsed from the nature of the Living Word of God (Jesus Christ)*. This is so if it is granted that in its two-fold form, the essential nature of the Word of God remains the same no matter how different the forms may be. Indeed, if such were not the case, it would be theologically

inappropriate to speak of both Jesus Christ and the Scriptures as the Word of God in this sense.

*It is appropriate theologically to do so because of the essential qualities or attributes Jesus Christ and the Scriptures, both as the Word of God, share.*

1. *Divine Origin:* The action of the Holy Spirit on the writers of Scriptures moved them to write. The action of the Holy Spirit made Mary to conceive Jesus. (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3: 15-16; Luke 1:26-32)
2. *Divine Ability:* In hearing the Scriptures, one can be convicted of one's sin and become converted, even as hearing Jesus can convict a person of one's sin and that one can become converted. (Acts 2:37-42; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:15; Luke 5: 1-8; John 20: 24-29; Acts 9: 1-16)
3. *Divine Revelation:* Both Jesus and the Scriptures convey the message of salvation and make known the will of God. They both communicate God's truth. (John 10:28; 14:6; Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:15; Psalm 1:16; Psalm 119:160)
4. *Mediation of God's Presence:* One can have an encounter with God in reading and studying the Scriptures even as one can have an encounter with God in meeting Christ Jesus. (Psalm 119:18; John 20:24-29)
5. *Spiritual Food:* Jesus is the living bread and the Scriptures are milk for the believer. (John 6:33-48; I Peter 2:2)
6. *Spiritual Light:* Jesus is the light of the world and the Scriptures are a light unto our path (John 8:12; Psalm 119:105, 130)
7. *Other Qualities:* Both the Scriptures and Jesus are said to be capable of judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Matthew 9:4; Hebrews 4:12)

There is a limit to every analogy. In any analogy certain things are being compared. *The essence of the analogy is the feature of one thing is reflected in the other.* The assumption is the things being compared are different. Thus, in any analogy, some differences already exist, even if the things in question are essentially the same. Take water and ice. They are of the same make-up. However, one is liquid while the other is solid, an obvious difference. To say the two are essentially the same nature does not mean in every way, they are identical, or share all the same attributes. What is being conveyed is the basic components of the two are the same, or the same category.

*In comparing Jesus Christ and the Scriptures, the same holds true here. Some things are obviously different.* In making the analogy, we first identify the feature being compared; then we show that such feature is reflected in both Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. The feature being compared is the Word of God attribute. The Word of God attribute, according to this analogy, is reflected in both Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. We show that what is basic to the concept of the Word of God in one is also true in the other. Beyond that, the analogy breaks down, like any analogy would.

*The living Word of God, namely Jesus, has a divine aspect as well as a human aspect. He is truly divine and he is truly human.* Divine here means pertaining to God or the proper attributes of God. The essence of what is true of the nature of the Living Word of God is equally true of the written Word of God. The Scriptures are truly divine and truly human. The Scriptures are truly the Word of God and they are truly the words of human beings. The Christian community must therefore become aware of this dual nature of the Scriptures as the Word of God.

Some Christians tend to emphasize the *divine aspect of Scriptures* and fall into the error of not perceiving *the human aspect*. Others only see the Scriptures as mere human product or account, simply a witness to God and overlook the divine element. *But a true Christian understanding of the Word of God must recognize these two dimensions of the Word of God.*

There are critics who would assert that the idea of the Scriptures as the Word of God having two aspects or natures –divine and human – is not taught in Scriptures, and that it makes no theological sense to speak of the divine nature of Scriptures. It could be argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in Scriptures as well. Yet, the majority of Christians use the concept of the Trinity to convey our understanding of God who is one. Therefore, *just because something is not explicitly taught in Scriptures does not mean it cannot be used to convey a Christian understanding.* The question is can the insight in question be logically derived from the Scriptures?

*Scholars who have difficulty with the concept of the divine nature of the Word of God are likely those who think of Word in purely Western terms.* Perhaps, a biblical or African perspective may help. If the Word of God can do that which only God can do, e.g., convict one of sin, then, somehow God must be actively present in the Word of God; or, the Word of God must share some essential attribute of God. In either case, there is a divine aspect of the Word of God, and thus of Scriptures. The Word creates; only God creates! The Word of God shares attributes unique to God.

The Israelites had to use a substitute word for the *personal name of God* – a *Word*. *That four letter personal name, the Tetragrammaton,* was holy and could not be uttered. *The personal name of God, which came from God, embodied the very essence of*

*God. In a similar trend of thought, the Word of God, which is personal to God and comes from God, embodies some essential attributes of God. The Word of God is the “primary means by which God is present and acting in the world.” In that sense, God’s very presence is an essential attribute of the Word of God. Thus, the Word of God has a divine aspect to it. It shares certain attributes unique to God; for example, the Word is eternal, only God is eternal. In the African sense, the Word is an entity, not an abstraction; and every entity is made of something and thus has a nature. It follows that the Word of God as an entity has a nature. Therefore, it is not theologically amiss to speak of the divine aspect or nature of Scriptures as the Word of God, at least not in the African sense. (For further discussion, see my book, *Through African Eyes*, pp. 33-44; 148-152.)*

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