Fresco, Visoki Dečani monastery (Kosovo), fourteenth century.

Jesus Christ and Same-Sex Marriage

Marjorie Corbman, Steven Payne, and Gregory Tucker

The broad shift towards acceptance of same-sex relationships and sex in Western culture has been met consistently over past decades by opposition from the Orthodox Church. More recently, in response to the extension of civil marriage legislation to include same-sex couples, many Orthodox hierarchs and theologians have sought to rearticulate and disseminate what they consider to be the Church's unchanging doctrine of marriage. Thus, in 2012, the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) reiterated, in a statement that has many parallels across the Orthodox world: "The Orthodox Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality, firmly grounded in Holy Scripture, 2000 years of church tradition, and canon law, holds that marriage consists in the conjugal union of a man and a woman, and that authentic marriage is blessed by God as a sacrament of the Church."[1]

What are the arguments found among the Orthodox against blessing marriages between individuals of the same sex? There are broadly two ap-

[1] SCOBA, "Marriage and the Moral Crisis in our Nation," May 16, 2012, http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/2012/marriage-and-moral-crisis.

proaches, both of which are found in the SCOBA document quoted above. In the first, abstract theological premises are marshaled in order to argue that gender distinctions are *necessary* within the marriage, if the union is to be an example of *natural* relationship (that is, relationship properly constituted). Appeals to Trinitarian love as "unity-in-distinction" or to the iconic complementarity of Christ as bridegroom and the Church as bride are characteristic of this approach. In the second, opposition to the blessing of same-sex marriages is framed in historical terms. Critics appeal to the monolithic tradition of the Church and to the authority of a past in which, it is argued, marriage was understood correctly (even by non-Christians) and the distinction between genders was clear and reinforced by the Church and society. This approach commonly quotes from the church fathers on sexual relations between men (same-sex relationships between women are largely absent from this debate) or the text of the Byzantine marriage rite. The supposed breakdown of the complementarian understanding of marriage and gender is often linked directly with the rise of secularism and a condemnation of widespread sexual promiscuity which is presented as a special feature of secular societies.

We will argue here that both of these approaches are misguided from the start by their false identification of marriage, the nuclear family, and binary-gender anthropology as core components of Christian theology and practice. Furthermore, exponents of both types of argument universally fail to reflect critically on the undue prominence given to marriage and the nuclear family in modern Western culture, and how this, in fact, represents a departure from the views on marriage and family expressed historically by most Orthodox hierarchs and theologians. Of greater concern to us is the fact that, by exalting heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family as the very heart of Christian practice, and making the defense of the "traditional" family a primary focus of public discourse and action, advocates of these approaches actually *displace* the proclamation of the *gospel* altogether and obscure the work of those who wish to evangelize cultures rather than merely condemn and oppose them on moral grounds.

In both Scripture and the writings of the fathers, the primary place in which Christian love is cultivated and fostered is *not* the nuclear family, but rather the community of disciples—dispersed throughout space and time—which has been given new life in Christ and is sent out by the Spirit to "proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19, Isa. 61:1–2). The love of God that is poured into the hearts of the people in this community (Rom. 5:5) is emphatically *unlike* that of the inward-looking, self-satisfying, defensive unit of love imagined by defenders of "traditional marriage." Instead, Christian love is expansive and diffuse, reaching out to the ends of the earth, to the most abandoned and hopeless places. The Church must renew its fidelity to Jesus Christ by eschewing the temptation of cultural nostalgia for Christendom and rededicate itself to serving as light for a world that stumbles in darkness (Matt. 5:14).

In this article, we will briefly outline the theological problems with the current imagined roles for marriage, family, and gender identity in Christian life, as well as the historical difficulties with appealing to the tradition of the Church for the primacy of heterosexual marriage. We will show that, historically, the Church, for the most part, has viewed marriage as a social institution that might be tolerated so long as it did not interfere with the demands of discipleship. In conclusion, we will argue that there is no compelling reason that the Church today should not bless marriages between people of the same sex who are committed to following Jesus Christ within the community of disciples.

Theological Arguments Against Same-Sex Marriage

Many modern attempts to justify exclusively-heterosexual marriage in theological terms have appealed to the pattern of relationship within the Trinity. The use of Trinitarian doctrine as the starting point for reflection on matters of life and practice has become a hallmark of much contemporary theology within Orthodox circles and beyond. More specifically, theologians have frequently turned to Trinitarian models and vocabulary as a generative source for fresh insights into issues presenting themselves to the Church today, including matters of church order and governance and changes in societal norms and values.

The full significance of this rise in "Trinitarian theology" cannot be assessed in this essay. What is important to note is that, despite its pervasive influence, the legitimacy of this approach and its fidelity to the long theological tradition has been quite seriously challenged in many quarters. A now-classic essay by Karen Kilby, for example, concludes:

> The doctrine of the Trinity [is] . . . a kind of structuring principle of Christianity rather than . . . its central focus: if the doctrine is fundamental to Christianity, this is not because it gives a picture of what God is like *in se* from which all else emanates, but rather because it specifies how various aspects of the Christian faith hang together. . . . Theologians are of course free to speculate about social or any other kind of analogies to the Trinity. But they should not, on the view I am proposing, claim for their speculations the authority that the doctrine carries within

Portrait of Gregory of Nazianzus from an eleventh-century manuscript of his *Homilies*. Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

the Christian tradition, nor should they use the doctrine as a pretext for claiming such an insight into the inner nature of God that they can use it to promote social, political, or ecclesiastical regimes.[2]

The sole purpose of the patristic "doctrine of the Trinity" was rather to safeguard the *mystery of Christ*. Indeed, the "doctrine of the Trinity" must be recognized as a subsequent synthesis and framing of patristic ideas and language—which were primarily oriented to expounding the mystery of God in Christ—rather than the systematic work of individual fathers. That is to say, Trinitarian vocabulary and grammar was developed to ensure that Christ was understood as "true God from true God," and therefore as the one who can truly save, and the Spirit likewise as "the Lord, the Giver of life," who can therefore truly bestow on us the life of the risen Christ. Any theology that disconnects Trinitarian language from its proper scriptural and economic mooring risks obscuring the fact that the apostles preached the revelation of the crucified and risen *Christ*, "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), and not the disclosure of Trinitarian metaphysics. The life of God *in se*, beyond what is revealed in Christ and made fruitful by the Holy Spirit, remains a mystery—a reality shrouded in human "unknowing." Saint Gregory the Theologian cautions us most strongly against speaking with plain confidence about such matters and extrapolating erroneously from the theological vocabulary of generation:

> You cannot say what God is, despite your boldness and your presumptuous investigations. Give up your verbal diarrhœa [ῥεύσεις], your hairsplitting [διαιρέσεις], and analytical dissections [τομάς], your habit of imagining bodiless nature as a body. . . . The begetting of God must be honoured by silence. It is a great thing for you to learn that the Son was begotten. But as for the how of it, we acknowledge that not even angels can conceptualise it, much less you. Shall I tell you how it was? It was in a manner known to the Father who begot and to the Son who was begotten. Anything more than this is hidden by a cloud and escapes your dim sight.[3]

Quite clearly then, any appeal to the relational language of Trinitarian theology as a bulwark against assaults on the exclusivity of heterosexual marriage is fraught with difficulty at the most fundamental level. And this is before one even begins to consider the problems raised by extrapolation into the realm of conjugal relationships from the primary metaphor for the Trinity, which presents two of the divine persons as Father and Son. Rather, the source and object of theological reflection is Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, who is the wellspring and encapsulation of Christian life and doctrine. As Saint Maximus the Confessor writes:

> [Christ]—considered according to the idea of his humanity—comes to God himself, *appearing* as a man, as it is written, *before the face of God* the Father *on our behalf*—he who, as Word, can never in any way be separated from the Father—fulfilling as man, in deed and truth, and with perfect obedience, all that he himself as God had preordained should take place, having completed the whole plan of God the Father for us, who through our misuse had rendered

[2] Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection," *New Blackfriars* 81 (October 2000): 443–44.

[3] Gregory of Nazianus, *Third Theological Oration* 8, in "Gregory of Nazianzus: Five Theological Orations," trans. Stephen Reynolds (unpublished manuscript, 2011), https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/36303/1/Gregory%20of%20Nazianzus%20Theological%20Orations.pdf. This translation has been selected for its accurate and striking vocabulary.

ineffective the power that was given to us from the beginning by nature for this purpose.[4]

Nothing is lacking in Christ's saving work, nor can anything be added to it: he accomplishes and reveals all that God the Father intends for us. Put simply, all that it is to be a human being in perfect relation to God is revealed in Christ.

In the context of a discussion about marriage, the uniqueness of Christ himself as the summation of our knowledge about God places limits on the potency of contemporary appeals to the Pauline metaphor of the bride (Church) and bridegroom (Christ), which is derived from Ephesians 5:25–33. Many Orthodox Christians have used this passage to argue for the divinely-ordained necessity of gender distinctions in marriage, sometimes arguing that such distinction is necessary for marital love to reflect the interpersonal love within the Trinity.[5] This passage is unique in the New Testament in how it links the saving work of Christ to the relationships between married persons, which possibly explains why it was chosen as the epistle reading for the Orthodox marriage rite when the Church eventually began to ritualize the union. In context, the passage occurs within a larger description of how Christ himself should be viewed as the pattern for whatever life situations believers find themselves inhabiting. This includes relationships between children and parents (6:1–4) and slaves and masters (6:5–9). The aim of the author was to instill in the letter's hearers the notion that, whatever one's social status or condition, this mode of life must be related back to Christ. The text offers no Christian critique (or justification) of the power structures of the first-century Roman household (which were deeply unjust, by modern Western standards), questioning nei-

[4] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 41, in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[5] See, for example, Bradley Nassif, "The Holy Trinity and Same-Sex Marriage," *Public Orthodoxy* (blog), Fordham University Orthodox Christian Studies Center, August 22, 2017, https://publicorthodoxy.org/2017/08/22/trinity-and-gay-marriage/.

ther the patriarchal relationships between husbands and wives nor those between masters and slaves, whom it commands to serve their masters as "slaves of Christ" (6:6). The letter does not offer a systematic, prescriptive treatise on a Christian social order, but only reinterprets commonly accepted social responsibilities in terms of the mystery of Christ.

Yet this passage is central to the arguments of many contemporary commentators whose goal is to defend the institution of heterosexual marriage. And so, for the text to serve this end, they must reverse its logic. The differences between the text's instructions to wives and husbands (which correspond to the different legal roles and prerogatives held by men and women in this context) are essentialized and theologized to yield insight into the mysteries of God's Trinitarian nature and its "union-in-distinction," which is, in turn, made the basis for human gender differentiation. Thus, rather than arguing that all ways of life and social contexts must be reinterpreted by the proclamation of Christ crucified and risen, as in the original passage, these commentators instead use the text as part of a circular argument that elucidates the nature of God by way of a social situation described in the text. Then, this extrapolated theology is used to reinscribe the unchangeability of the social condition with which the exercise began. There is no more justification in the text for this interpretation than for one which would use the letter's parallel discussion of the relationship between slaves and masters in order to argue for inherently, divinely-ordained distinctions between slaves and masters (an argument that was, in fact, used by pro-slavery Christians in American history to argue that slavery had its origins in God). Beyond the exegetical and ethical problems with this interpretation, the use of the gender distinctions in Ephesians 5 as a source of knowledge about God obscures the scriptural assertion that Christ alone—wholly apart from marriage—revealed everything that we need to know about God for our salvation.

This points naturally to the need for further reflection on the problematic mapping of the marriage metaphor onto the human gender binary that undergirds many contemporary theological responses to same-sex marriage. This trend has unfortunate similarities to the kinds of sociological and psychological analyses of religion that perceive idealized male and female characteristics as being represented by Jesus and Mary respectively. Enthusiastically taken up by some modern Christians, this highly problematic model claims that Mary somehow essentially embodies feminine characteristics such as compassion and tenderness, which are absent or recede from the character of Jesus. While Orthodox defenders of exclusively heterosexual marriage do not necessarily describe their rigidly gender-binary differentiation of the sexes in reference to such embodiments of gender stereotypes (though some do—especially when they talk of men being drawn to the "masculine" characteristics of Christ and women to the "feminine" characteristics of the Theotokos), nevertheless their interpretation of the eschatological marriage metaphor of Christ and the Church as a guide to relationships between the sexes makes both binary gender difference and heterosexual intercourse

Opposite: A late antique Roman woman attended by two domestic slaves. Mosaic from Sidi Ghrib baths, fifth century. Bardo National Museum, Tunis.

into "sacred"—and, therefore, necessarily *permanent*—realities, flying in the face of much of the Orthodox exegetical, doctrinal, and ascetic tradition.

Since the beginning of the apostolic mission, Christians have underscored the fact that all difference apparent in human life—including, *explicitly*, gender difference—is rendered impotent by the person of Christ himself. The Apostle Paul famously wrote to the nascent churches in Galatia, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27–28). Christian hope lies in the renewed creation of a humanity that is emphatically *not* conditioned, determined, or constrained by culture, ownership, or gender. Saint Maximus later developed this point when he wrote, "[Christ] united, first of all, ourselves in himself through removal of the difference between male and female, and instead of men and women in whom this mode of division is especially evident, he showed us how properly and truly to be human beings, thoroughly formed according to him, bearing his image intact and completely unadulterated, touched in no way by any marks of corruption."[6]

Although both Jesus and Paul almost certainly *assumed* in their use of marriage metaphors and in pastoral counsel that marital unions would be constituted between a man and a woman (after all, such was the societal norm in both Roman-occupied Palestine and imperial Greek cities of the first century), it is significant that in neither case is the gender binary foregrounded in their teaching as essentially definitive of marriage as such. In fact, from the perspective of a theology that takes as its starting point the mystery of Christ crucified and risen, the positing of a gender binary as fundamental to our understanding of what it means to be human is untenable. Moreover, the enshrining of a particular interpretation of a biblical passage on marriage (which, in fact, *relativizes* the significance of marriage in the light of Christ) as the ultimate goal of male and female humanity does injustice to the scandal of the cross—the only authentic gospel in Paul's eyes (1 Cor. 1:18–21).

Historical Arguments Against Same-Sex Marriage

One can see from both official and unofficial statements that many Orthodox Christians would argue that the weight of tradition—which is thought to enshrine binary gender difference, exalt heterosexual marriage, and disparage same-sex intercourse—would itself alone, *in spite of any strength of theological argument to the contrary*, prevent the Orthodox Church from blessing same-sex marriages. Such is the contemporary power of the mythical self-identification of the Orthodox Church as the institutional embodiment of an unchanged and unalterable "ancient faith" that the presumed antiquity of an idea or practice almost always trumps any theological argument for or against it. Thus, the mere fact that the Orthodox Church has, until now, not blessed same-sex relationships is considered by many opponents of them to be a knockdown argument, silencing any further conversation on the subject. Yet historical investigation actually yields a far more complex picture of the Church's

[6] Maximus, *Ambiguum* 41.

thought and practice in matters of anthropology, sexuality, asceticism, marriage, and family life than many contemporary presentations would admit.

So, arguments in favour of "traditional" marriage and against same-sex relationships which seek to proceed along historical lines face a number of specific challenges. To begin with, the church fathers lived and thought with cultural frameworks (which included biological, psychological, and moral presuppositions, among others) quite different from our own, with the result that the moral inferences they made from the gospel for their own time cannot be mapped onto ours without very careful reflection, because the premises of various discourses have shifted. This might lead us to question, for instance, the appropriateness of quoting the fathers' infrequent condemnations of same-sex intercourse (which was often pederastic or cultic in antiquity) in the context of a contemporary discussion of consensual relationships between adults. Furthermore, it is inescapably the case that the Orthodox Church has historically exhibited considerably less enthusiasm for heterosexual marriage and family life than is commonly assumed today. For example, any attempt to ground binary gender difference and heterosexual marriage as "divine ordinances" within a plan set forth in Genesis must overcome the patristic exegetical tradition, which reads the key verse, "increase and multiply and fill the earth and exercise dominion over it" (Gen. 1:28), in a strikingly different key. For example, the great Byzantine patristic synthesist, Saint John of Damascus, writes in *The Source of Knowledge*:

> After the transgression . . . to prevent the wearing out and destruction of the race by death, marriage was devised that the human race may be preserved through the procreation of children. But they will perhaps ask, "What then is the meaning of 'male and female' and 'increase and multiply' [i.e., since these come before the transgression]?" In answer we shall say that "Increase and multiply" does not primarily refer to the multiplying by the marriage bond. For God had power to multiply the race also in different ways, if they had kept the precept unbroken to the end.[7]

In fact, early Christianity exhibited a pervasively deep ambivalence towards marriage and family life in general, which were judged as presenting a powerful temptation to cling to worldly things. Thus, we may accept Saint Gregory of Nyssa's statement on this point as representative: "*In the cases where it is possible at once to be true to the diviner love, and to embrace wedlock*, there is no reason for setting aside this dispensation of nature and misrepresenting as abominable that which is honourable."[8] Marriage is not a specially appointed path that, when certain supposedly timeless conditions are met, leads inexorably to heaven's door; rather, it is a social institution that may be respected—if and when it does not come between a Christian and God.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence above is that marriage between a man and a woman is not a way of life uniquely blessed by God from the beginning. Such a view, for one thing, necessarily warps the understanding of monasticism into a denial of one's (presumably) natural

calling to marriage. Moreover, what people present as the exclusively heterosexual nature of marriage (and, by implication, the gender-binary anthropology upon which its ideological defense depends) is not a core theological insight of Christianity from the beginning. There is no "biblical marriage," per se, unless by that term people mean marriage as it was practiced in very many different ways over more than a millennium in the pre-modern eastern Mediterranean societies in which the books of the Bible were written and compiled. Rather, marriage is a contingent social phenomenon, inessential to and not iconic, in and of itself, of salvation in Christ.

The historical evidence of ecclesiastical marriage practice in the Eastern Christian world overwhelmingly supports this analysis. As Gabriel Radle has recently argued, the origin of the Orthodox marriage service seems to have been pre-Christian nuptial ceremonies that were gradually taken under the Church's control.[9] The ecclesiastical blessing of marriage was not made a universal requirement in the Eastern Roman Empire until 893 (by Leo the Wise, Novel 89), and, even then, slaves were not granted the right to legal, ecclesiastical marriage until 1095 (by Alexios I Komnenos, Novel 35). Thus, not only was the emergence of ecclesiastical marriage a relatively late phenomenon, but it was so little based on Christian theological principles that it was not thought necessary to extend this rite to all members of the Church, and the liturgical texts themselves were simply adapted from traditional rites that predated the emergence of Christianity. By far the most important function of marriage appears to have been the legitimation of male heirs for the purpose of guarding family wealth and power. Few defendants of exclusively heterosexual marriage who appeal to the model for marriage provided by the past would be so bold as to announce this as the primary function of marriage today.

Historical study not only points us to a picture of the past which is inconveniently complex for many commentators but also reveals the more important truth that the past (even to the limited extent that it is accessible to us) cannot yield answers to questions which are properly theological in nature. An over-confidence in both insufficiently-examined history and myths of historical continuity has thus led opponents of same-sex relationships to a dead end. Incidentally, it has also driven the mistaken attempts of some scholars to seek historical precedents for same-sex marriage in the Orthodox tradition. Ultimately, history cannot resolve (or silence) this debate: the Church's mind must once again be occupied with theology.

Same-Sex Marriage and the Way of Christ

Cumulatively, the arguments highlighted above point to the need today for what we might call a "desacralization" of marriage and family life in contemporary theological discourse. These institutions are neither permanent nor uniquely holy in themselves—though they may be permitted to Christians who are strong enough in their faith to prevent the temptations and duties of marriage from standing between them and the more incumbent duties of discipleship. The current cultural trend is

[7] John of Damascus, *The Source of Knowledge* (or *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*) 4.24, in vol. 9 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1899). Translation modified.

[8] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 8, in vol. 5 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1893). Translation modified.

[9] Gabriel Radle, "The Development of Byzantine Marriage Rites as Evidenced by *Sinai Gr. 957*," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 78 (2012): 133–148.

to burden marriage and the nuclear family with the almost exclusive role of providing human beings with opportunities for intimacy and depth of relationship. The gospel and much subsequent Christian tradition, in contrast, foreground the *community of disciples*—made up of all nations, genders, social positions, and ages—as the primary location in which such love is cultivated, blessed, and sent out into the world. Marriage is simply one among many possible situations in which Christians are called, above all else, to the discipleship of their Lord. The third-century theologian, Tertullian, sets out just such a vision of married life as shared discipleship in his exhortation, *To His Wife*:

> What kind of yoke is that of two believers? Of one hope, one desire, one discipline, one and the same service. Both are siblings [*fratres*], both fellow servants, no different in spirit or flesh; indeed, they are truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, the spirit also is one. Together they pray, together prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts; mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. They are both equally in the church of God, equally at the banquet of God, equally in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments. Neither hides anything from the other; neither shuns the other; neither is troublesome to the other. The sick are visited, the indigent, relieved with freedom. Alms are given without torment; sacrifices are made without scruple; daily diligence is performed without impediment. There is no stealthy signing, no trembling greeting, no mute benediction. Between the two echo psalms and hymns; and they mutually challenge each other, which shall better chant to their Lord. When Christ sees and hears such things, he rejoices. To these he sends his own peace. Where two are gathered, he himself is in the midst of them. Where he is, there the Evil One is not.[10]

[10] Tertullian, *To His Wife* 2.8.7–8, in vol. 4 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Translation modified.

Marriage, in its various contingent forms throughout history and in different societies, receives a Christian character by being a context (one among many) in which conformity to Christ can be perfected.

Thus, looking towards Christ as the perfecter and uniter of humanity, it is difficult to see why the Church should refuse to bless marriages between persons of the same sex where such a practice has found widespread social acceptance. In what way would such a union *inherently* prevent the kind of discipleship outlined above by Tertullian? Or why, by definition, are two persons of the same sex, who are committed together to a lifelong pursuit of the apostolic life, unable to manifest in themselves the missional discipleship of the risen Christ? Does Christian discipleship amount only to the cheap lionization of the self-enclosed nuclear family—a uniquely modern phenomenon and the social unit upon which capitalism, with all its global injustices, most relies for its reproduction? Or does the gospel, rather, involve a grander vision of a Spirit-filled communal life, totally given over to dismantling structures of evil, promoting justice for the poor and destitute, proclaiming the coming kingdom, healing the sick, ransoming prisoners, breaking down barriers, and having faith that today's myriad of crosses cannot permanently silence

the messianic power of radical love? How would persons of the same sex united in marriage be any less able to live out this life than anyone else? Indeed, if we look to our contemporary crucifixions, it is rather those unmoving crusaders for the "sanctity" of heterosexual marriage who are only too happy to nail their LGBTQ+ siblings to the cross.

We Christians are called, in whatever situation we live, to unreserved discipleship of our Lord. This discipleship is the same for all who are called according to God's purpose: it involves, in all situations and for all people, the total offering of one's self for a world enveloped by evil, injustice, and hatred. While no condition of life is inherently sacred and more suitable for discipleship, in the struggle for the freedom to lay down their lives as Christ himself did, many Christians have found comfort and encouragement in marriage, which furnishes them with a consistent context for joy and sorrow on the way, and presents its own specific opportunities for self-sacrifice without restraint. Marriage is now a social institution open to two persons, however they identify themselves or are identified by society. Lacking compelling theological or historical arguments to the contrary, it is time for the Church to bless the marriages of *all* who seek to follow Jesus Christ. ✠

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