

## Creation and Natural Law

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*From Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian  
Same-Sex Partnerships, 1993*

*John argues from an Anglican standpoint that fidelity should be a more central issue for Christian marriage than procreation, and that homosexuals can pass that test, if they would only be allowed to.*

Some will still argue that even a relationship of this quality must be condemned on the ground of Paul's so-called natural law objection that it is against the God-given pattern of creation. In an article defending this position one writer sums up such an argument with the comment that "to accept homosexual acts by inverters would be to deny the doctrine of creation . . . the whole biblical teaching on creation, sex, marriage, forgiveness and redemption will be fundamentally altered" (G. Wenham).

So let's consider the biblical argument from creation. What, scripturally speaking, is the purpose of sex? What was God's will in creating male and female? One might have assumed childbirth, but, surprisingly perhaps, in Genesis itself the primary reason that God created a companion for Adam is not said to be procreation, but because "God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone'" (2:18). Complementarity and companionship are at least as much a part of God's plan in creation as childbirth. Indeed it is remarkable that in the Genesis account childbirth emerges only as an afterthought, and in the rather negative context of

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God's punishment of Eve (3:16). It is highly significant that Jesus and Paul, while both referring to the creation story, never once mention procreation or physical sexual difference in their teaching about marriage. On the contrary, their stress is entirely on the quality of the relationship, and in particular that it should be a covenant of total sexual fidelity and indissoluble union. Furthermore, the insistence on fidelity is never explained, as we might expect, with reference to practical reasons of childbearing or domestic stability, but always with reference to the personal and spiritual implications of sexual union.

For Paul, sexual union *always* has spiritual consequences, whether for good or ill. Promiscuous sexual activity involves desecration of the body, which is a temple of the Spirit and itself a member of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 6: 15–20). But where sexual union expresses mutual love and commitment, that relationship becomes a *μυστήριον* (Ephesians 5: 32), a holy mystery or sacrament which reflects the covenant union of the faithful love between Christ and the Church, and which itself becomes a channel of love and grace in the world. For each human being to make such a covenant is for him or her to realize an important part of what it means to be made in God's image. It means to further his primary and ultimate purpose in creation by reproducing the kind of creative (but not necessarily procreative) self-giving love that is basic to God's own nature. Accepting homosexual relationships does not mean jettisoning this fundamental biblical teaching about the sacramental character of human sexuality.

Those who continue to cling to a natural law argument against homosexuality on the basis of Romans 1 should also be reminded that Paul appeals more frequently and clearly to natural law and the creation story in order to justify his now abandoned teachings about the veiling and silencing of women. Paul

said that women must be veiled because man was created first and it is primarily man who is the image of God (1 Corinthians 11: 7-8). It is shameful for a man to wear long hair and a woman to wear short hair because "nature itself teaches us so" (1 Corinthians 11: 14; a much clearer expression of "natural law" than anything in Romans 1). No woman is permitted to teach or to hold authority over men, and women are commanded to be silent "because Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Timothy 2: 12-14). These are theological arguments which appeal to God's plan in creation no less than Romans 1: 18ff., and indeed Paul is much clearer about their authoritative status and the practical rules he intends to deduce from them, even to the point of saying the silencing of women is a command of the Lord, and if anyone disputes it he is to be rejected (1 Corinthians 14: 33-38). It is obvious that Paul lays far more weight of doctrine and authority on this teaching about women than on his passing references to homosexuality. Yet the fact that today it is consistently ignored, even in the most traditional churches, is not felt to "deny the doctrine of creation" or "to alter fundamentally the whole biblical teaching on creation, sex, marriage, forgiveness and redemption."

I remarked that the original biblical prohibition of homosexuality was probably written in the situation of the Babylonian exile, as a mark of Jewish separateness from the surrounding culture. Babylon remains a powerful symbol for modern secular society, and in one sense it might fairly be argued that the situation of Christians has *not* changed. As "aliens and exiles" Christians still understand themselves to be called, no less than the Jews in Babylon, to a distinctive morality and a distinctive holiness which will challenge the world in sexual matters as in all else (1 Peter 2: 3). This is not to be denied. The point is that the most

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distinctive and constructive witness that homosexual Christians can offer, both to "Babylon" in the shape of the secular gay scene and to the Church itself, is the witness of relationships marked by the same quality of holy and faithful love to which heterosexual Christians are called in marriage. . . .

### What You Do

ANDREW SULLIVAN

*From The New Republic, March 3, 1996*

*If procreation is essential to marriage, then why doesn't Patrick Buchanan have any children?*

Andrew, it's not who you are. It is what you do!" Buchanan yelled across the table. We were engaged in a typically subtle "Crossfire" debate on same-gender marriage. I'd expected the explosion, but it nevertheless surprised me. Only minutes before, off the air, Buchanan had been cooing over my new haircut. But at least he could distinguish, like any good Jesuit, between the sin and the sinner. It was when his mind drifted to thoughts of homosexual copulation that his mood violently swung.

Okay, Pat, let's talk copulation. It isn't only me that has a problem here.

Buchanan's fundamental issue with "what homosexuals do"

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is that it's what he calls a "vice." (I'll leave aside the demeaning reduction of "what homosexuals do" to a sexual act.) Now, there's a clear meaning for a vice: it's something bad that a person freely chooses to do, like, say, steal. But Buchanan concedes that gay relations aren't quite like that; they are related to a deeper, "very powerful impulse," (his words) to commit them. So a homosexual is like a kleptomaniac who decides to steal. Kleptomania is itself an involuntary, blameless condition, hard to resist, but still repressible. Kleptomaniacs, in Buchanan's words, "have the capacity not to engage in those acts. They have free will."

So far, so persuasive. The question begged, of course, is why same-gender sexual acts are wrong in the first place. In the case of kleptomania it's a no-brainer: someone else is injured directly by your actions; they're robbed. But, in the case of homosexual acts, where two consenting adults are engaged in a private activity, it's not at all clear who the injured party is. Buchanan's concern with homosexual acts derives, of course, from the Roman Catholic Church. And the Church's teaching about homosexual sex is closely related to its teaching about the sinfulness of all sexual activity outside a loving, procreative Church marriage.

The sexual act, the Church affirms, must have two core elements: a "procreative" element, the willingness to be open to the creation of new life; and a "unitive" element, the intent to affirm a loving, faithful union. In this, the Church doesn't single out homosexuals for condemnation. The sin of gay sex is no more and no less sinful on these grounds than masturbation, extramarital sex, marital sex with contraception, heterosexual oral sex or, indeed, marital sex without love.

In some ways, of course, homosexual sex is *less* sinful. The heterosexual who chooses in marriage to use contraception, or who masturbates, is turning away from a viable alternative: a



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unitive, procreative sexual life. The homosexual has no such option; she is denied, because of something she cannot change, a sexual act which is both unitive and procreative. If a lesbian had sexual relations with a man, she could be procreative but not unitive, because she couldn't fully love him. And if she had sex with another woman, she could be unitive in her emotions but, because of biology, not procreative. So the lesbian is trapped by the Church's teaching, excluded from a loving relationship for no fault of her own; and doomed to a loveless life as a result.

The Church urges compassion for such people (a teaching which, somewhere along the way, seems to have escaped Buchanan). But the Church's real compassion is reserved for another group of people who, like homosexuals, are unable, through no fault of their own, to have unitive and procreative sex: infertile heterosexuals. The Church expresses its compassion not by excluding these couples from the sacrament of marriage, but by including them. Sterile couples are allowed to marry in church and to have sex; so are couples in which the wife is post-menopausal. It's understood that such people have no choice in the matter; they may indeed long to have unitive and procreative sex; and to have children. They are just tragically unable, as the Church sees it, to experience the joy of a procreative married life.

The question, of course, is Why doesn't this apply to homosexuals? In official teaching, the Church has conceded (Buchanan hedges on this point) that some homosexuals "are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable." They may want, with all the will in the world, to have a unitive and procreative relationship; they can even intend to be straight. But they can't and they aren't. So why aren't they allowed to express their love as humanely as they possibly can, along with the infertile and the elderly?

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The theologians' best answer to this is simply circular. Marriage, they assert, is by definition between a man and a woman. When pressed further, they venture: well, sexual relations between two infertile heterosexuals could, by a miracle, yield a child. But, if it's a miracle you're counting on, why couldn't it happen to two gay people? Who is to put a limit on the power of God? Well, the Church counters, homosexuality isn't natural, it's an "objective disorder." But what is infertility if it isn't a disorder? The truth is, as the current doctrine now stands, the infertile are defined by love and compassion, while homosexuals are defined by loneliness and sin. The Church has no good case why this should be so.

I harp on this issue of the infertile for one delicate reason: Patrick and Shelley Buchanan do not have kids. Why not? Generally, I wouldn't dream of bringing up such a question, but I am merely adhering to the same rules Buchanan has laid out for me. From the public absence of his children, as from the public statement of my homosexuality, I can infer certain things about Buchanan's "lifestyle." Either Buchanan is using contraception, in which case he is a hypocrite; or he or his wife is infertile, and he is, one assumes, engaging in non-procreative sex. Either way, I can see no good reason why his sexual life is any more sinful than mine.

Of course, by merely bringing up Buchanan's childlessness, I will be judged to have exceeded the bounds of legitimate debate. But why doesn't the same outrage attach to Buchanan for his fulminations against others whose inability to lead a procreative married life is equally involuntary? Of course, Buchanan goes even further: because of what he infers about my private sexual life, he would celebrate discrimination against me and use the bully pulpit of a campaign to defame me. Why is it unthinkable that someone should apply the same standards to him?

I'll tell you why it's unthinkable. No one should be singled

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out and stigmatized for something he cannot change, especially if that something is already a source of pain and struggle. Indeed, I would regard anyone's inability to have children, if he wanted to, to be a sadness I should privately sympathize with and publicly say nothing about. Why, I wonder, cannot Buchanan express the same compassion and fairness for me?