

ADAM AND STEVE REVISITED¹: THE PROBLEM WITH GAY

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The debate over the morality and rationality of same-sex marriage has been one for which enormous mental energy, time, ink and paper has been spent in recent time. It is an issue that has engaged and will continue to engage concerned intellectuals in our modern society. Sentiments have been poured out uninhibitedly from worried parties either condemning or defending the justice of the so called “gay rights”, a right that calls for a radical redefinition of the concept and purpose of conjugal relationship and its socio-cultural meaning for the modern man. As we already know, advocates of the gay rights have succeeded in gathering some votes in some political and religious circles with regard to attracting sympathy for their cause. The present worry, however, is whether such victories won by them are indicative of modern society’s sincere compassion for those in need of social acceptance or do they merely resonate the insanity of a decadent civilisation.

The issue of the justifiability of gay union is very significant because it strikes at the very heart of the truth about human sexuality, namely, the reality of sexual differentiation between man and woman in nature and the ultimate purpose of this reality. Making a contribution to this ongoing debate has become for me a temptation that is increasingly irresistible to ignore. Reason and common sense tells us that nature is not purposeless. By the aid of science we have been able to discover that our universe is governed by a set of immutable mathematical, chemical, biological and physical laws which were already there only for us to discover, study, and apply them for our own use. There is also the natural law: the law of reason by which we as rational beings apprehend truth and come to right judgement. These laws work to effect order in the universe.

The human being is not the author of these laws but he/she is their custodian. Being creatures themselves, humans are also controlled by these laws which precede and therefore, super-cede them. They cannot change these laws at will because the laws possess in themselves a teleological necessity that is antecedent to human society. Humans can only recognise that such laws exist. In some cases, they can also abstract from them to make human laws that govern relationship of human beings in a given society. The various cultures of this world may have emerged out of such abstraction gradients and in the process of their becoming had to bear the mark of the variety and distinctiveness of contingent human perceptions of reality. In the emergent cultures, however, there exist unchanged and unchanging realities that bear testimony to the objectivity and universality of truth. If it were not so, the laws of nature and of reason would be merely capricious, and natural and ethical order would then only be an illusion. But natural order as we know it is an objective reality to be experienced and learnt by humans. The sun rises and sets irrespective of whether we want it to or not. The creation myth of the book of Genesis makes it clear in its chronology that the human being met an ordered universe that was good: “...and God saw that all was good. And God said: let us make man in our image, after our own likeness” (Gen. 1: 26). The central message of this creation story would only seem to suggest that man, as the last creature to be made by God, awoke to a consciousness of an already ordered universe with laws and structures that are inherently good. One of this inherent goodness in creation is

¹ “*Between Adam and Steve*” is the title of an article written by Rev. Fr. Stan Chu Ilo and published in the website www.civilizationoflove.org, an article that first awakened my interest to contribute to the ongoing debate on same-sex marriage and as a result influenced my present choice of the above title.

the goodness of human sexuality which itself is a reflection of the Imago Dei: "In His own image He created him, male and female He created them" (Gen. 1: 27).

A very important task then faced man immediately after his realization of his existence in the world, a task that would secure for him extraordinary power and sovereignty over all creatures. And that task was to give names to created things (cf. Gen. 2: 20), hence, invariably to make definitions of concepts. This task of defining reality is a sole prerogative of man as the only creature who makes use of language. Here is a point that is significant in the entire discourse of human sexuality and the ever growing controversy over the issue of same-sex marriage, especially in our new age of "deconstruction". The question may be asked: Does the right of man to define reality include also an arbitrary power to divest such reality of objective meaning and thus subordinate them to the whims of ever changing times and attitudes? Are there objective truth and meaning that are changeless and, therefore, beyond alteration by man? Does man's giving of meaning always equate to truth and, therefore, always right? Are there reasonable criteria by which the truth of man's definition of reality could be critically judged and its objective rationality demonstrated? These questions confront us in a very serious way today as we face the challenge posed by some people in the western culture who want to force on everybody a redefinition of the word "spouse" in order to secure hitherto non-existing rights to people with deviant sexual orientation.

According to the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, "Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself. That which can be articulated in a disclosure (as in cultural expressivity) by which we understand, we call "meaning".² For Heidegger, Meaning is an existentials of Dasein, not a property attaching to entities, lying behind them, or floating somewhere as an intermediate domain. Only Dasein has meaning and it alone can be meaningful or meaningless. In other words, Dasein's own Being and the entities disclosed with its Being can be appropriated in understanding, or can remain relegated to non-understanding. The meaning of marriage as a conjugal relationship can therefore not be isolated from the Dasein of the partners involved in that relationship. In his *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger further writes: But because truth is in essence freedom, historical man, though he lets things be, cannot really let what-is be just what it is, and as it is. What-is is then covered up and distorted. Illusion comes into its own.³

It has been remarked by Karl Jaspers and Nicholas of Cusa that man's intellect can prostitute itself to anything. Through perversion, meaning could easily be adopted differently when what-is is not let to be as it is. An example of such a phenomenon was cited by Aquinas in answer to whether the Natural Law is the same in all men:

...and as to knowledge, since in some the reason is perverted by passion, or evil habit, or an evil disposition of nature; thus formerly, theft, although it is expressly contrary to the natural laws, was not considered wrong among the Germans as Julius Ceaser related (*De Bello Gallico*, vi).⁴

Meaning basically has its roots in the "in-here" of something. And unless the "in-here" meaning of marriage is recognized, accepted and respected by

² Heidegger, M., *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) p. 193 emphasis mine.

³ Cf. *Existence and Being*, intro. and analysis by Werner Brock, first American edition (Chicago: Regnery, 1949) p. 309

⁴ Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologica* Vol. 1a, Art. 4 pt. 1-11, as cited by Egbujie, Ihemalol I., *Hermeneutics of the African Traditional Culture. An Interpretative Analysis of African Culture* (Nyangwe, Zaire: Omenana, 1985) p. 12

humankind, that human family envisaged by us as the basic unit of society becomes an illusion.

David S. Crawford's recent article, *Liberal Androgyny: "Gay Marriage" and the Meaning of Sexuality in Our Time*,⁵ is very educative in its exposition of the inherent contradictions and logical impasse in the Liberals' and Radicals' arguments for same-sex union, as well as the profound ideological implications of such attempts at inventing a new sexual anthropology to justify gay marriage. Crawford reminds us of how during the nineteenth century, the prevailing sexual ethic changed from one dominated by procreation to one based on pleasure. But such a new ethic required a way to define what is normative and what is deviant. The categories "Heterosexuality" and "Homosexuality" accordingly emerged in the developing field of psychoanalysis as contradistinctive categories that stand for normal and perverse sexual behaviours respectively. For, in order to say what is psychologically normal and morally permissible, it is necessary also to say what is abnormal and forbidden.⁶ In fact one would say that any attempt to explain away "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" as nothing other than "alternate", but nevertheless essentially equivalent "orientations" and thus classify homosexuality as natural, as liberals do, simply amounts to *petitio principii* (begging the question).

The two most popular epistemological definitions of truth have always been (1) truth as coherence, and (2) truth as correspondence. Moral truths could also be tested by subjecting them to the logic of coherence or correspondence of a priori categories of reason to external reality. I would, therefore, like to examine in this article what I consider three authoritative voices of truth, voices that compel us to listen to their univocal unravelling of how the coherence or correspondence of eternal laws and physical reality in them helps us in appreciating or rejecting the claims of the "Gay Rights Movement", and determining the unchanging truth of the meaning and purpose of marriage. I am referring to nature, culture, and revelation (or religion) as authentic repositories of objective truth. The institution of marriage is after all one that has always been vested with natural, cultural and religious importance throughout history. It is, therefore, not the need for tolerance and human compassion for those who feel socially alienated as a result of their sexual orientation, which ought to underlie the current debate, but rather the real meaning and integrity of the most important institution of human society, an institution that is being radically jeopardized in our time. As Paula Ettlbricks makes clear, the goal of lesbians and gay men is that of "providing true alternatives to marriage, and of a radical reordering of society's view of reality."⁷ It appears then that the real motive behind the "Gay Rights Movement" is yet to be fully unravelled. The question now is: Should modern society surrender to this threat of the gay ambition and acquiesce to such a "radical reordering" which carries with it an invention of a new, fluid and contingent pseudo-meaning of marriage. Or can we still try to discover and retrieve an absolute meaning of marital union through the logic of reason and critical observation of the phenomena of natural science? In other words, has nature anything to tell us on this theme?

The Voice of Nature

⁵ Crawford S David, in *Communio International Catholic Review*, Vol. XXXIII, No.2, Summer 2006, pp. 239-265

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 253

⁷ "Since When Is Marriage a Path to Liberation?" Quoted at <http://www.narth.com/docs/unrights.html>. see also Crawford S. D. *Ibid.*, p. 252

Nature's voice, I suppose, is the most radical and vehement in its brutal rejection of such ideas of pairing which the modern gay orientation advocates. Most of natural phenomena demonstrate a polarisation between pairs of opposites. And all productive unions in nature are union of opposites. Not only is the union of non-opposites unproductive, nature appears to rebel against such unions. Two strong examples are found in the laws that govern all electro-magnetic actions or reactions. In Magnetism, like poles (e.g. N+N or S+S) repel each other whereas unlike poles (N+S) attract each other. No amount of force, ("rape", Vergewaltigung) would make two like magnet poles to join together. This is a fact of elementary physics.

As in magnetism, so it is also in electricity. Electrical energy is transmitted by means of two alternate and distinct conductors: the active conductor cable which is known as the positive (+) and the passive conductor cable which is the negative (-). Any attempt to connect positive to positive conductor results always in a spark explosion while negative to negative connection yields no energy output. Hence, electricity is only possible through the union of the two unlike conductors. The violent reaction (i.e. explosion) with which electric energy objects to and indeed rejects the union of like cables, is an eloquent testimony of nature's abhorrence of such union. What the magnets and the electro-conductors are telling us here might be that the nature of a thing is absolutely linked with the function and purpose of that thing – a function or purpose which gives it a specific place and meaning in the order of creation. Human sexuality derives its meaning from the sexualised body of human beings. And marriage as an institution that grants moral and juridical legitimacy to sexual relationships in the society is based on an unequivocal understanding of sexual identity. As Crawford makes us understand, there is a fundamental shift in the liberal argument for gay marriage:

The identity of the person is no longer grounded in his masculinity or her femininity; it is grounded in his or her "orientation". This shift effectively demotes the meaning of sexual difference – the inescapable correspondence of the male and female bodies as such – to a sub-personal and purely material significance. The natural correlation between the masculine and the feminine is no longer central to sexuality. A person's sexual desire and freedom therefore possess a fundamentally indifferent relationship to his or her body's natural correlation to the opposite sex. The relation between "orientation" and the sexual polarity inscribed in the body is therefore external and arbitrary.⁸ Crawford summarises the implication of this liberal shift thus: "Even if an individual desires and relates to persons of the opposite sex, it is not due to the natural correspondence of the masculine and feminine; it is due to his or her "orientation", which only happens to be "heterosexual" rather than "homosexual".⁹ This is a notion whose logic is difficult to reconcile with nature. In his second book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says, "As a thing is with respect to being, so it is with respect to truth".¹⁰ Commenting on this statement, Dante Alighieri wrote:

The reason for this is that the truth concerning a thing, which consists in the truth as its subject, is the perfect image of the thing as it is. And so, of all things which have being, some are such that they have absolute being in themselves, others such that their being is dependent upon a relationship with something else: they exist at the same time with something which is their correlative, as is the case with father and son, master and servant, double and half, the whole and the parts, and many other such things. Because such things depend for their

⁸ Crawford, *Ibid.*, p. 256

⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2.1 [Tr. By Robert S. Haller]

being upon another thing, it follows that their truth would depend upon the truth of the other; not knowing the “half”, its “double” could not be understood, and so with the other cases.¹¹

Hence, the truth of the meaning of “husband” is dependent on the being (maleness) of the subject which in turn derives its meaning from the truth and being (femaleness) of another subject “wife”. And both constitute the “in-here” of marital partnership. It would be impossible to arrive at an authentic integrated vision of the human person or human sexuality without an appreciation of the inherent truth or meaning or vocation that is built into the sexually differentiated body. Not even a redefinition of the word “spouse” to mean “two persons” (that is, avoiding the mention of “man” and “woman”), would secure validity to pro-gay arguments. This is because what constitutes the human being is essentially male and female. And as Crawford rightly observes, “the inescapable correlation between the male and female bodies is an ordination not only of material reality – the product of a mindless biological necessity or chance – but of the person him- or herself.”¹² The “Gay Rights Movement”, therefore, makes its appeal through a liberal model that insists that our sexual identity is irrelevant to the question of what we are, thus advocating an altogether anthropological nullification of sexuality and gender. For this reason, I agree with Crawford that it obscures itself in a contradiction because it asks for assimilation into the existing institution of civil marriage while at the same time subverting or evacuating the meaning of that institution.¹³ Indeed nature has a purpose and even the magnets and copper cables appear to be docile to this purpose. Why not human beings?

The Voice of Culture

Tradition is forever in the making. We are the heirs and heiresses of it but as heirs and heiresses we built on what is handed down. We do not destroy our heritage because doing so will mean destroying our root, our past, and hence, our future. Culture and tradition have significant roles that must not be ignored in shaping the norms of human relationship. For it is precisely in man’s relationship with fellow human beings and with nature that culture is born. As a general term, Ralph Linton [The Study of Man (New York 1936)], sees culture as referring to “the total social heredity of mankind”.¹⁴ Similarly, William X. Taylor, (Basic Facts of Anthropology) defines culture as “the totality of the patterns of living practiced by man at all places and all times”.¹⁵ This is why I consider the voice of culture a very eloquent voice in the present discourse. In spite of the evident cultural pluralism of our world, we know that the concept of marriage has remained one whose meaning is never essentially altered by cultural differences. And the recurring decimal – the common denominator – in the understanding of marriage in every culture down the ages is that it is a bond of love between a man and a woman primarily for the purpose of procreation and, secondarily for mutual emotional support. “Meaning” and “intention” as the mediating forces between Being and man, are at once both the primary and secondary, efficient and formal causes of a culture. The culture of marrying in human society can therefore not stand independent of the age-long meaning and

¹¹ Dante Alighieri, *Letter to Can Grande della Scala* in David H. Richter ed. The Critical Tradition, Classic Texts And Contemporary Trends (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989) pp. 119f

¹² Crawford, *Ibid.*, p. 261

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 265

¹⁴ See G. O. Lang, Culture, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Thomson Gale, 2003) p. 427

¹⁵ See cited. by Egbujie, Ihemalol I. *Ibid.* p. 19

intention that has been handed down from generation to generation with incredible unanimity in every culture. The gender specific nature of the cultural definition of marriage is also something that is without exception in the existing cultures of the world. There may be monogamous (one man, one wife), polygamous (one man, many wives) or polyandrous (one woman, many husbands) cultures, but throughout history there has never been an androgynous culture, even though gay and lesbian people have always existed. Hence, even as the cultural ideal of marriage differs among peoples, its essential structure as a gender relationship remains the same till the present age. One is then forced to admit that the human cultures of the ages understood the gay attitude for what it is: at best a defect in psycho-sexual development whose cause is difficult to identify, and at worst a perversion. It all depends on the will to call something by its name.

Today the battle for “gay rights” has become one of the fiercest intellectual and cultural battles of our time. It is pitched between the liberals/radicals versus the conservatives. The victory on the ideological level is increasingly becoming a matter of who has more control of the language, and on the socio-political level, a matter of who has more control of the legislation. Whichever way the victory eventually swayed, one point is important. As the French writer Marcel Proust (1871 – 1922) says, “the truths which the intellect apprehends directly in the world of full and unimpeded light have something less profound, less necessary than those which life communicates to us against our will in an impression which is material because it enters us through the senses but yet has a spiritual meaning which it is possible for us to extract.”¹⁶ The message which is given to us through the voices of nature and culture ought to be interpreted by us as signs of many laws and ideas which we must contemplate in order to draw forth truth, and then convert that truth into its spiritual equivalent. I think this is precisely what revealed religion¹⁷ does when it articulates precepts which it calls “divine positive laws”, or when it makes a claim that some words written by human beings are “the Word of God”. For those who believe, therefore, (and they are not few), such a Word of God represent also a very authoritative voice of truth.

¹⁶ *The Meditation on Time and Memory* from *Time Regained* in David H. Richter, *The Critical Tradition*, p. 475

¹⁷ Here I make reference to Judeo-Christian religion.

The Voice of Revelation

I do not want to appear to make the argument from Scripture pre-eminent even though I consider the voice of revelation as the most preponderant of all in this discourse. I am aware that acceptance of the authority of the truth of divine revelation is a matter of faith which not everybody has. However, it is important to note St. Paul's harsh reproach in 1Cor. 6: 9 which condemns among other vices, also homosexual sodomy. At the heart of the biblical castigation of sexual immorality (which only includes but does not restrict itself to homosexual acts), could be seen the need to restore value and sacredness to a love that has been disordered. It also throws light, especially for Christians, on how the Word of God judges such acts, namely, as volitional acts with full human responsibility. Some people who argue that the biblical writers were unaware of a predisposed character (Veranlagung) of homosexual behaviour indeed have an enormous burden of proof for such a natural predisposition.

Again one often hears the argument that biblical condemnation of homosexual acts was due to the fact that the bible considers procreation rather than "emotional commitment" as the ultimate purpose of marriage. Hence, such sexual relationships that are not procreative in purpose are categorised as sinful. Such views reject the use of biblical premise on the ground that its message is anachronistic, (i.e., addressed to a particular people, in a particularly cultural and historical context that is no longer valid today). But for Christians, nothing should be seen to diminish the eternal relevance of the Scriptures. Moreover, it is precisely in its fecundity, its procreative character as a natural source of new human life, that sexual intercourse between a man and a woman derives its sacred character. And it is this sacredness that raises marital union to a level of divinely ordained institution – a sacrament. The ontological sexual polarity of man and woman confirms the coherence of the biblical, natural and cultural notions of marriage. Any attempt to divorce marital union from its primary procreative purpose, therefore, not only repudiates the cultural universality of that purpose which the bible only seeks to confirm, but also robs marriage itself of its sacred character as the only source of human life. What St. Paul was defending, therefore, was life as lived and communicated to us by the author of Life himself, Jesus Christ.

Christian religion is not alone in its traditional notion of conjugal relationship. All of the world's great religions appear to be unanimous in their basic understanding of marriage, and this unanimity is too universal to be coincidental. Modern society's attempt to prioritise mutual pleasure or "emotional commitment" in marriage as against procreation forgets the fact that these values, unlike procreation, are not exclusive to marriage. Friendship is a relationship of emotional commitment, and many recreational activities offer a bounteous promise of pleasure. What justifies the claim to a right of marriage as consequent on the need for emotional commitment and mutual exchange of pleasure still remains a question which pro-gay advocates have not satisfactorily answered. Why would gay and lesbian people not be content with remaining true friends to each other rather than seeking to empty marriage of its spiritual value merely for the sake of their purely material need of gratifying and inheriting¹⁸ one another? Again, we must know that the rejection of biblical authority on such an important moral issue implies a radical questioning of the

¹⁸ I mention "inheritance" because the need to have their partners legally recognized as their legitimate next of kin has always been the most popular reason advanced to justify acceptance of homosexual and lesbian "couples" in western culture. This type of reasoning is too flimsy to be convincing.

authority and authenticity of the truth of divine revelation in general and the relevance of the Christian religion in particular.

Conclusion

As we have seen, our three authoritative arbiters, nature, culture and religion seem to be communicating a common message with regard to the essential nature and purpose of conjugal relationship. We must admit, however, that nature can be defective as in a case of a man born blind. His blindness does not define his physical nature as human simply because he came into the world with it. It is not natural to him but rather a defect of his nature. We owe compassion, respect and solidarity to our brothers and sisters who for one reason or another are unable to relate sexually in a normal way that corresponds to their respective sexual identity, but we at the same time owe them frankness (parrhesia). "The virtue of frankness", according to Bernard Häring, "never raises the issue of whether our actions and words about the truth of salvation help or hurt us. The crucial point is always whether and how they promote the salvation of everyone. In view of the frankness of Christ, no price for parrhesia should strike us as too high."¹⁹

The problem of homosexual tendency is neither solved by denying that it is a problem nor by giving the problem a normative value which it does not deserve. Moreover, owing to the difficulty in discerning the dividing line (if there is any) between homosexuality as immutable disposition and homosexuality as perversion, one is prevailed by an ever increasing obscurity to hesitate in making a blanket judgement in favour of such a curious, if not abnormal, sexual tendency. As much as it is important to emphasize that no one is free from sin and no individual should be considered more depraved than the other, it is also necessary for human society to be aware that the fecundity and sacredness of conjugal life are values not too cheap to be sacrificed on the altar of relativism.

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¹⁹ Häring B., *The Virtues of an Authentic Life: A Celebration of Spiritual Maturity trans.* by Peter Heinegg (Bandra, Mumbai: St Pauls, 1998) p. 139