



Ordained Servant

August-September 2016

marriage
sexuality

& faithful
witness

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY, AND FAITHFUL WITNESS

August-September 2016

From the Editor

As many of you are aware, the Committee on Christian Education sponsored a pre-assembly conference on June 8: “Marriage, Sexuality, and Faithful Witness.” In this issue of *Ordained Servant* we have published summaries of those addresses. The committee hopes that these addresses and their published form will assist the church in navigating the present challenges in our culture to a biblical view of marriage and sexuality.

Both general and special revelation are clear on the existence of two and only two sexes. However, in its fallen condition humankind have tended to distort the gift of sexuality through a variety of sexual sins. What is unique to the present Western context is the attempt to reinvent the institution of marriage and gender itself.

Rev. Dr. Carl Trueman, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, looks at the subject of modern sexuality and identity politics in “The Path to—and from—Here: Reflections on Sexual Identity Past and Present.” Elder Randy Beck (PCA), the Justice Thomas O. Marshall chair of constitutional law at the University of Georgia School of Law, looks at the legal history that led to the recent Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage and at related religious liberty issues in “Living under Foreign Law.” Rev. Tim Geiger, president of Harvest USA, a ministry that equips the church to care for those who are struggling with sexual sin, gives practical instruction on how the church can pastorally minister to people who are struggling with same-sex attraction and gender confusion in “Speaking the Truth in Love.”

Pastor Stephen Tracey reviews *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation*, the 2012 report to the synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and Rosaria Butterfield’s *Openness Unhindered* in his review article “Sexuality These Days.” Joel Carini, reviews Sherif Girgis, *What Is Marriage?*

On a completely different topic, John Milton’s “On His Blindness” deals with the suffering that began when he became totally blind at age forty-four. This poem was originally titled “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent.” The last two decades of life, spent in darkness, however, proved to be well spent, since his greatest poetic production was during that period.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-22.pdf

- “Ministering to Homosexuals in San Francisco.” (Charles A. McIlhenny) 6:1 (Jan. 1997): 10–12.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Witness

The Path to—and from—Here: Reflections on Sexual Identity Past and Present

by Carl Trueman

I want to start this article by making a number of foundational points.¹ First—and most important—is the distinction between the issues surrounding the pastoral care of those subject to sexual dysfunction and the way in which sexuality is being used as the primary idiom of a form of politics in the Western world. As to the former, it is a truism that all human beings struggle with sexual dysfunction to some extent and that a central part of pastoral work is always going to be concerned with such. That is not my topic today. I am going to restrict myself very specifically to—for want of a better term—sexuality as cultural politics. The distinction is key because to confuse the two is highly problematic. It can lead us on the one side to be mesmerized by the aggressive campaigns for normalizing dysfunction and thus to lose sight of the agony of individuals who want pastoral care in such matters. On the other it can lead us to underestimate the ruthless and comprehensive intentions of the political lobby groups who have sexuality at the heart of their campaign to transform the civic realm, not least in the area of religious freedom.

The second foundational point is the importance of understanding the particulars of the matter before us. When faced with particular matters, there is a tendency in Christian circles often to resort to the answer “Well, the world is fallen and we are sinful. What more explanation do we need?” That is true—but also unhelpful in knowing the times and responding to them. I could make the case for gravity being the reason why the Twin Towers collapsed on 9/11, and that would be a technically true statement. But it would tell me next to nothing about why they really fell down. Universal principles which explain everything in general actually explain almost nothing in particular. And it is important to respond in an informed way to the particularities of our times if for no other reason than we need to help our congregations understand why we believe as we do and how the world around is attempting to reshape their thinking. There is therefore a need for studying the path to our present age beyond resorting simply to the category of sin.

The third point is this: We need to be aware that the particular pressure points in the current situation, primarily matters of sexual identity, are themselves only a part of a much more comprehensive shift in the way in which society thinks. The fact that transgenderism has moved so quickly from the exotic outer margins to the very center of political discourse indicates that the politics of sexual identity rests upon a much wider and deeper transformation of human identity than simply sexual preference. And that so many of us have been caught by surprise by the rapid acceptance of transgenderism, not to mention federal mandates with reference to such, reveals how blind we have been to

¹ This article is based on an address given at the pre-assembly conference on June 8, 2016, entitled “Marriage, Sexuality, and Faithful Witness,” sponsored by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

these tectonic cultural shifts and to the means by which they have been made both normal and normative.

The Battle for the Self

At the heart of the social and political transformation we are witnessing lies a fundamental transformation in the way individuals understand themselves. This is a complex phenomenon and cannot be reduced to a single cause, or even to a couple of causes.

To press the conclusion first, I would suggest that sociologist Phillip Rieff's argument that we live in the era of psychological man is extremely useful.² Rieff's taxonomy of the self is overdrawn but helpful. The self in ancient Greece was political man, one who found his meaning in engaging in life in the polis. Political man gave way to religious man, who found his meaning in religious rites and observances. Religious man gave way to economic man, who found his meaning in economic activity. And economic man gave way to psychological man, who finds his identity in his own inner well-being and happiness.

The taxonomy is overdrawn because self-understanding has always been complicated. Thus, the Augustine of the *Confessions* is arguably a psychological man, finding his identity in his inner dialogue and struggles. Yet if we take Rieff as pointing to dominant characteristics of particular ages, then his taxonomy holds.

The precise nature of this Psychological Man has been established by various forces, some sophisticated, others decidedly demotic. At an intellectual level, we might make a case for the role of voluntarism and philosophical nominalism, increasingly dominant since the late Middle Ages, as downplaying the objective givenness of the world. Later, romanticism too played its part as the artistic counterpart to such philosophical developments. Of course, romanticism is a vast movement but we might perhaps take the preface to Wordsworth and Coleridge's influential collection of poems, *Lyrical Ballads*, as something of a manifesto for the romantics. Here Wordsworth makes *pleasure* the central purpose of the poet's task and poetry itself "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."³ The inward, psychological term is obvious, as we might also note, for example, in William Blake's poem "The Garden of Love," in Beethoven's late string quartets, or in the powerful artwork of J. M. W. Turner.

We might add to this the role of consumerism within society. The role of advertising, easy credit, and the capturing of the popular imagination by the idea that consumption is the key to happiness is yet another element in the story that places the individual at the center of the universe. Indeed, this is a story that makes the individual believe that he is able to construct his own meaning and significance.

The Marriage of Psychology, Sex, and Politics

Perhaps the most significant background to our current problems, however, has been the fusion of politics and psychology. This story is wide-ranging and complicated but a central narrative can be identified. The influence of Sigmund Freud is central. It was Freud who both set sex at the center of human identity, both individual and social, and

² See Phillip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (New York: Viking, 1959), 329–57; *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (1966, repr., Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006).

³ William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 598.

who identified happiness with genital stimulation and satisfaction. Here is what he says in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: “[M]an’s discovery that sexual (genital) love afforded him the strongest experiences of satisfaction and in fact provided him with the prototype of all happiness . . .”⁴

For Freud, happiness in its most basic sense was sex, but notice how this connected to what had gone before. Happiness and personal satisfaction had been the hallmark of Enlightenment thinking and found its most artistic expression in romanticism. What Freud did was take the internalizing impulse of romanticism and set it forth in scientific idiom of psychoanalysis, thus giving his philosophy a persuasive form of expression. He also thereby focused the issue of human identity and happiness specifically upon human sexuality. We might perhaps paraphrase an argument from Rosaria Butterfield here and say that Freud turned sex from something we do into something we are.⁵

The second part of the narrative is the connection between the Freudian shift in the understanding of what it means to be human and the transformation of Left-wing politics.

By the 1950s it was clear that old-style Marxism was failing to deliver the utopias which it had promised. Classical Marxism had operated with a notion of oppression which was understood in economic terms. Workers were alienated from the products of their labor, a situation to be rectified by them seizing control of the means of production.

From the 1930s onwards, however, the notion of “oppression” in Left-wing theory underwent a transformation that ultimately saw it rooted in psychological, and therefore sexual, categories.

Italian philosopher Augusto Del Noce summarized the developments on the Left as follows:

It is clear that what today is called the left fights less and less in terms of class warfare, and more and more in terms of “warfare against repression,” claiming that the struggle for the economic progress of the disadvantaged is included in this more general struggle, as if the two were inseparable.⁶

Key figures in this shift were Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, both of whom were important inspirations for the sexual and political revolutions of the 1960s. Reich is particularly important. His book *The Sexual Revolution* was published in 1936 but reads as if it were written yesterday.

Where Freud saw the repression of sexual instincts as key to civilization, Reich saw such repression as inhibiting true human identity and as creating the pathologies and the dysfunctions of the world. He believed that human beings needed at least one orgasm a day and proposed that the government should supervise and indeed enforce the sexual liberation of the populace. Here is a key quotation:

[T]he free society will provide ample room and security for the gratification of natural needs. Thus, it will not only not prohibit a love relationship between two adolescents of the opposite sex but will give it all manner of social support. Such a

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. and W. Norton, 1961), 56.

⁵ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2015), 94–98.

⁶ Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, ed. and trans. Carlo Lancellotti (McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 166.

society will not only not prohibit the child's masturbation but, on the contrary, will probably conclude that any adult who hinders the development of the child's sexuality should be severely dealt with.⁷

Two things are important here—two things that help explain our current situation: human beings are seen as having an identity that is fundamentally sexual (one might even perhaps say “orgasmic”) in nature; and the state is seen to have a duty to provide the conditions where this individual, sexual, orgasmic identity can be realized. Politically, that has implications for everything, perhaps especially for the family. Del Noce summarizes it as follows: “What is the repressive social institution par excellence? To Reich it is the traditional monogamous family.”⁸

No Private Matter

This is why the sexual revolution through which we are now living is not, and never has been, a private matter. Libertarian notions that the government should not interfere in the bedroom are, I believe, correct. What consenting adults do in the privacy of their own home is really none of the government's business. But the problem is that the sexual revolution is not about the private bedroom. It is about the public square. This is because we are not dealing with personal tastes and freedoms. We are dealing with what it means to be allowed to be human.

And this helps explain one of the most potent moves in the sexual revolution in the United States: the co-opting of the rhetoric of the civil rights movement. When sexuality is identity, then sexuality has access to all of the cultural rhetoric which surrounds other identities and, most significantly, to the moral history of such.

We should not underestimate this connection. Because the language of freedom/oppression and the background of the civil rights movement has been so comprehensively adopted by the LGBTQ lobbyists, it is virtually impossible to express any dissent with the movement without being immediately categorized as an irrational bigot motivated by hate.

The Transformation of Everyday Ethics

The story of the populist end of the sexual revolution is complicated, so once again what I present is neither exhaustive nor elaborate.

First, we need to understand that nobody has argued society in general into changing its opinions on human identity and sexuality. This is one of the points often missed by those who think with their brains. For example, I am regularly asked in class how to argue against gay marriage. My response is that it is pointless to argue against something for which no arguments have been made in the first place. That is, of course, hyperbole but my point is basically sound: the sexual revolution is part of an overall revision of what it means to be a person; and that revisionism has been brought about not so much by argument as by other means.

Foremost in this regard is the entertainment industry. Movies and commercials are essentially adverts for particular understandings of personhood. More than anything else,

⁷ Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 23–24.

⁸ Del Noce, *Crisis*, 161.

they have created the stories with which people identify and thus the understanding of what it is to be human. Of course, these stories are often not simply fictional in their plotlines but also fictional in their presentation of the basic realities of human existence.

Take, for example, soap operas. The plots often deal with outrageously improbable happenings, but there are sufficient elements of ordinary life contained therein. Thus, affairs, divorces, and deaths abound. But is it very, very rare that these things are portrayed as truly devastating. Human beings are presented as constituted by a series of isolated experiences, not really as the complex social and historical creatures that we are.

Soap operas may be a crass example, but the kind of simplistic presentation of the dynamics of human existence occurs in movies too. I have coined the term “sempiternal orgiast” to try to capture the kind of human life presented therein—those who live merely for their own personal satisfaction in the present moment. And in a world where movies are reality, that message is powerful.

To this we might add the role of commercials. Interestingly enough, it was Freud’s American-based nephew Edward Bernays who is the key figure here. He was the man who turned the advertising industry from one which sold goods on the basis of function to that based upon the sale of an image. For example, the earliest commercials for automobiles focused on the practical usefulness of being able to go from A to B in a swift, efficient manner. Bernays altered this, connecting cars to an image, and often an attractive, sexual image, in order to make them desirable objects. That move was critical—and amazingly successful. And it is that powerfully seductive notion of desire, image, and personal fulfillment thereby, which undergirds the commercial industry to this day. We need to understand that every commercial we ever see is projecting an image of Psychological Man to us: human beings as those who find fulfillment in the purchase of goods that will make us happier and, more often than not, sexier.

We should also note here that the narrative dynamics of movies and commercials depend for their power on what we might call aesthetics, or taste. Take the sitcom *Will and Grace* for example. The plots were carefully constructed to make the lead gay character an attractive and likeable person. Implicitly, this presentation carries moral weight, for who wants to say to attractive and likeable people that they are fundamentally wrong in the matter of their own personal sexual preferences? But this ethical weight is carried by the aesthetics and nothing else. One could say many things about the way such products of pop culture function in shaping the ethical debates within our society, but two things are of especial note: they do not present arguments but they do grip the moral imagination; and they are ubiquitous.

The Role of Pornography

This brings me to another part of the popular story: pornography. It is by now a truism that we live in an age where pornography is more widely available and more heavily used and—if reports are true—more varied and extreme than at any previous point in history. The social costs of this are yet to be discerned, but it is easy to believe that regular exposure to pornography from an early age will create serious dysfunction in adult sexual relationships.

My interest here today, however, is not in the dysfunction which pornography is going to generate in relationships. It is instead the matter of how pornography is reshaping the understanding of what is sexually normal. Again, recall what I said earlier

about the nature of Psychological Man and the importance of sexual fulfillment as the core of human happiness.

Here is a quotation from an essay by Roger Scruton in the important volume *The Social Costs of Pornography*, a wide-ranging book which covers many aspects of the problem:

Pornography exactly conforms to the myths about desire that I have rejected: it is a realization of those myths, a form of sexual pleasure from which the interpersonal intentionality has been surgically excised. Pornography takes hold of sexual desire and cuts away the desire. There is no real object, but only a fantasy, and no real subject, since there is nothing ventured of the self. To say that this is an abuse of the self is to express a literal truth—so it seems to me.⁹

Scruton's point is important: pornography divorces sex from any real relationship. Think of the consequences of that: to detach sex from relationships is to detach sex from any moral narrative extraneous to the personal pleasure derived by the participants. And that is to offer an ethic of sex which says "anything goes."

In other words, pornography is the ultimate commercial designed to resonate with the desires of Psychological Man. Its message is simple: it really is all about you and you alone and your immediate sexual gratification. The problem is therefore far deeper than mere lust. It presents a deep and disturbing view of human identity. And given what we now know about the impact of pornography on human physiology, particularly its ability to transform the neural pathways of the brain, it is surely no surprise that a society basting itself in pornography is a society where sex is deemed central to human identity and where sexual ethics have all but vanished. We might almost say that pornography is hardwiring society for a repudiation of traditional sexual ethics. As I have noted elsewhere, the real victor in the culture wars is perhaps an unexpected one: the Marquis DeSade.¹⁰

So Where Do We Go From Here?

First, I want to start by noting that we should not underestimate the power of what we are dealing with. That should seem obvious, given the outline I have offered above. The issues of gay marriage or transgenderism are not isolated and discrete problems for which there is some specific, narrow answer. They are part of a much longer and broader change in how we understand human personhood. So much is clear. But I want to add one more complicating factor at this point, drawing on the work of Charles Taylor.

In Taylor's books *The Ethics of Authenticity* and *The Malaise of Modernity* he addresses the issue of narcissism, which we might well understand as virtually synonymous with Psychological Man.¹¹ Taylor points out that it is typical to dismiss narcissism as shallow, but he attempts to offer a more ethical account of it in order to understand the passion with which it manifests itself. Take homosexuality, for example.

⁹ Roger Scruton, *The Social Costs of Pornography: A Collection of Papers* (The Witherspoon Institute, 2010), Kindle Locations 2632–2636.

¹⁰ Carl R. Trueman, "We're All Sadists Now," accessed July 11, 2016, <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/08/were-all-sadists-now>.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1991).

Why is it that the recognition, the public, social recognition and acceptance of homosexuality, is so important to homosexuals? Taylor would argue that this is because there is an ethical dimension to it: the recognition of a person's identity is an important social imperative. This is because, however fluid and psychological we care to make our identities, selves only exist in a social setting, in relation to other selves.

Why do I raise this as a point? For this reason: we need first and foremost to understand that the language about community that is used by homosexuals is not incidental. It points to the importance of homosexuality to their identity. The ideology of the New Left is powerful at the political level, shaping public discourse, but at the local level the power of identity manifests itself not so much in a political cause but in the ethics of community. We need to bear that in mind as we consider our response.

Second, we need to understand that political discourse in the United States is forever changed. Patrick Deneen noted with reference to the Indiana RFRA (Religious Freedom Restoration Act, 1993) that something new had emerged in the way politics is being done: an alliance between socially liberal causes and big business.¹² That is a powerful, even overwhelming, combination which can intimidate and coerce even those whose personal sexual ethics have not been transformed by popular entertainment. When you throw into the mix the law courts, the entertainment industry, and social media, it is hard to know how to mount any kind of large-scale resistance. For most, I suspect the alliance is not threatening because they are not worried about the policies it is promoting. But for those who dissent, the fear factor is significant. And that is going to spill over into impacting members of our congregations who will be faced with demands in the workplace that collide head-on with their own personal morality and Christian beliefs.

So what are we to do? I want to suggest four things.

First, we need to go about business as usual in the sense that we need to be obedient to our beliefs about how God's grace operates. Word, sacrament, and prayer should remain foundational.

Second, we need to be better educated in the field of ethics. I say this because as the gap between social practices and biblical morality becomes larger, and the proponents of those social practices become more aggressive and more litigious, pastors are going to be called upon to respond to questions from congregants where the immediate biblical answer may not be obvious.

Third, understand that times have changed and that nothing can be taken for granted. You preach to your congregation for just forty-five minutes once or twice a week. The television and the computer screen preach to them for countless hours from Monday to Saturday. With young people in particular, that homosexuality is unbiblical is not immediately obvious. That needs to be borne in mind as we preach and as we teach.

Fourth, remember the ethics of authenticity. To object to homosexuality is in one sense the same as objecting to any other sin—adultery, greed, anger. Yet in another sense it is quite different, for few if any think of their fundamental identity as being that of an adulterer, a greedy person, or an angry man. Nobody talks of the “adulterer community” or “the greedy community” or “the angry community.” There is an ethical drive relative to homosexuality that grips the moral imagination in a way that none of these others do and therefore demands social legitimation.

¹² Patrick J. Deneen, “The Power Elite,” accessed July 11, 2016, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/06/the-power-elite>.

What is the practical implication of this? Well, once again it is reminder to us not to underestimate the human difficulty of reaching homosexuals for Christ. As with Muslims, conversion is in a sense making a much greater demand on them than others. This is clear from Rosaria Butterfield's account of how her conversion really destroyed her life, humanly speaking, in that it immediately wrecked her career and isolated her from the community, which now regarded her as a traitor.

Second, it is a challenge to us to make sure that our churches are precisely what the New Testament calls them to be: communities, and communities marked by love. This is not a plea for the replacement, or subordination, of the means of grace to some kind of notion of church as social club. But it is to say that to be Christian is to be one whose fundamental identity is in Christ and who is therefore marked by a number of realities: a trust in the proclaimed Word of God and a love for God and for fellow believer in the community of the church.

And with this point I conclude. I believe that the battle at the national level is lost and will remain lost for at least a generation or more. But I also believe that the battle can be prosecuted successfully at a local level. Ironically, I am reminded at this point of a criticism the late New Left intellectual Edward Said made of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis. Said's point was simple: at the local level, where people live next to each other, where they speak to each other, where they have to make their communities work because perpetual street fighting is not an option, the situation is always more complicated and hopeful than a collision of ideologies. Indeed, I might add to Said's thoughts this paraphrase of something George Orwell said in another context: it is much harder to hate a man when you have looked into his eyes and seen that he too is a human being as you are.

Therein I believe might lie our glimmer of hope. As we go about our daily business, as we make the church a community of the preached Word yet marked in practice by openness and hospitality for the outsider—indeed, as the church reflects the character of the one about whom she preaches, the one who loves the widow and the orphan and the sojourner—we may not be able to transform national legislation or the plots of sitcoms and movies. But we will be able to demonstrate to those around us in our neighborhoods that we do not fit the caricatures that the media present, that we do care for those who are in active rebellion against the God we love. And there, in that local context, we might be able to start building our counter-offensive to the dominant culture of Psychological Man and his Reichian sexual revolution.

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Servant Witness

Living under Foreign Law

by Randy Beck

In *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) the Supreme Court recognized a constitutional right of same-sex couples to marry.¹ The decision has raised questions for churches holding the traditional view that God established marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. My goal in this essay is to highlight shifts in constitutional doctrine that paved the way for the Court's decision, and to note some of the legal issues biblically-oriented churches and individuals may face as they seek to follow Christ in a culture that views the world through other lenses. My purpose is educational; I do not intend to offer legal advice. I want to provide information about how we've gotten to this point in our legal history and highlight some of the possible implications moving forward.

When I consider the church's relationship to the surrounding culture, I focus on Scripture describing believers as citizens of a heavenly city. Paul says "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). Peter writes that we live "as sojourners and exiles" among the nations (1 Pet. 2:11–12). The author of Hebrews brings those ideas together, noting that our ancestors in the faith "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" and that God "has prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:13–16). We are citizens of heaven living as sojourners in this world. In some respects, we're like Israelites residing in Babylon during the captivity. Just as Daniel and his friends studied the language and literature of the Babylonians, I want us to understand how the Supreme Court reached its decision about same-sex marriage so we can think wisely about the ramifications.

Modern constitutional doctrine concerning regulation of marriage and sexuality derives from two clauses of the post-Civil War Fourteenth Amendment. The Due Process Clause provides that no state can "deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law." The Supreme Court has concluded that some liberties protected by the clause—including marriage—are sufficiently important to be deemed "fundamental." Fundamental liberties are so significant that the government needs an unusually strong justification to interfere with them. This theory of the Due Process Clause has been controversial, raising questions about whether courts should decide which liberties are most important and what methods they should use for identifying such fundamental rights.

The other relevant provision of the Fourteenth Amendment is the Equal Protection Clause, which provides that no state shall deny any person "the equal protection of the laws." The courts have understood this provision to require an unusually strong

¹ This article is based on an address given at the pre-assembly conference on June 8, 2016, entitled "Marriage, Sexuality, and Faithful Witness," sponsored by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

justification for certain classifications the government might want to draw. The easiest case is race, since the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted to protect the newly-freed slaves. When government treats people differently based on race, the courts have been very skeptical and have demanded a really persuasive justification. The more difficult question is what other distinctions between people are analogous to race and should be viewed with similar skepticism.

Let us begin with the Supreme Court's decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1964). Connecticut had a criminal statute punishing "any person who uses any drug, medicinal article or instrument for the purpose of preventing conception." Individuals connected with a family planning clinic were fined for counseling married couples about contraceptive use. Justice Douglas's opinion for the Court found that the statute violated a constitutional "right of privacy" that protected married couples:

We deal with a right of privacy older than the Bill of Rights—older than our political parties, older than our school system. Marriage is a coming together for better or for worse, hopefully enduring, and intimate to the degree of being sacred.

In a series of later decisions, the Supreme Court struck down laws deemed to intrude on fundamental marriage rights. For instance, in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), the Court invalidated a Virginia law forbidding interracial marriage.

The Court's understanding of the right of privacy evolved in subsequent cases. *Griswold* had relied heavily on the importance of the marital relationship, but later cases extended the right in ways that viewed marriage as non-essential. In *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972), for example, the Court rejected a Massachusetts law forbidding contraceptive distribution to unmarried persons. The Court had to explain why *Griswold* applied in a case that did not involve marriage:

It is true that, in *Griswold*, the right of privacy in question inhered in the marital relationship. Yet the marital couple is not an independent entity, with a mind and heart of its own, but an association of two individuals, each with a separate intellectual and emotional makeup. If the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child.

While the Court still talked about a right of "privacy," notice that it substituted a different meaning for the word. The "privacy" at issue in *Griswold* was that of a married couple in a particular space—the marital bedroom. In *Eisenstadt*, "privacy" now meant the ability to make important decisions without government involvement. *Eisenstadt* was relied upon the following year when the Court recognized a right to abortion in *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

As the Court expanded the constitutional rights protected by due process and equal protection, people wondered whether the Court would recognize heightened constitutional protection for same-sex relationships. The Court initially resisted such claims. In the first case claiming a constitutional right to same-sex marriage, *Baker v. Nelson* (1971), the Court summarily concluded that the appeal did not raise a substantial

federal question. The Court later decided that states could continue the historical practice of criminalizing sodomy in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986).

The tide began to turn in *Romer v. Evans* (1996), when the Court struck down a state constitutional amendment that prevented enactment of local laws protecting homosexuals against discrimination. One passage from the majority opinion illuminates the change in the Court's thinking:

[The amendment's] sheer breadth is so discontinuous with the reasons offered for it that the amendment seems inexplicable by anything but animus toward the class it affects; it lacks a rational relationship to legitimate state interests.

Notice two things about this passage. First, the majority believed the amendment was so broad in its prohibition of anti-discrimination laws that it could only be explained by animus—i.e., animosity—toward homosexuals. While the dissent disagreed with that assessment, it's important because it draws upon a popular narrative that opposition to legal protection for homosexual rights reflects at base an irrational dislike of homosexuals. The second point worth highlighting is that the Court here views homosexuals as a "class." The Court is no longer thinking primarily in terms of behaviors that anyone might engage in, but is instead focusing on group characteristics and issues of identity. The focus on homosexuals as a distinct class of people allowed them to be perceived as a kind of minority group.

A particularly significant ruling came in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), when the Court overruled *Bowers v. Hardwick* and invalidated a Texas sodomy statute. In the years after *Lawrence* a number of states began to recognize same-sex marriages, or to afford legal recognition under other labels, like "civil unions" or "domestic partnerships." The effects of those state laws were localized because of a federal statute called the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), enacted in 1996 and signed into law by President Clinton. One section of DOMA adopted the traditional definition of marriage for federal law and another provided that a state could deny recognition to a marriage from another state that violated its public policy.

In *Windsor v. United States* (2012) the Supreme Court invalidated the portion of DOMA dealing with federal law, requiring the federal government to recognize a marriage deemed valid in New York. The decision employed reasoning analogous to *Romer*:

DOMA seeks to injure the very class New York seeks to protect. By doing so it violates basic due process and equal protection principles applicable to the Federal Government. The Constitution's guarantee of equality "must at the very least mean that a bare congressional desire to harm a politically unpopular group cannot" justify disparate treatment of that group.

Windsor suggested that a majority of the Court was moving toward recognition of a constitutional right to marry for same-sex couples, a point ultimately reached in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). The *Obergefell* Court concluded that refusing to recognize same-sex marriage violates the liberty to marry protected by the Due Process Clause and the equal treatment required by the Equal Protection Clause.

Obergefell was a 5–4 decision, and each dissenting Justice authored a separate opinion. For the most part, the dissenters argued that the Court should leave the issue of recognizing same-sex relationships to resolution by the political process in each state. Chief Justice Roberts predicted that the decision would generate future conflicts in connection with religious organizations that for theological reasons embrace a traditional understanding of marriage:

The majority graciously suggests that religious believers may continue to “advocate” and “teach” their views of marriage. The First Amendment guarantees, however, the freedom to “exercise” religion. Ominously, that is not a word the majority uses.

Hard questions arise when people of faith exercise religion in ways that may be seen to conflict with the new right to same-sex marriage—when, for example, a religious college provides married student housing only to opposite-sex married couples, or a religious adoption agency declines to place children with same-sex married couples. Indeed, the Solicitor General candidly acknowledged that the tax exemptions of some religious institutions would be in question if they opposed same-sex marriage. There is little doubt that these and similar questions will soon be before this Court.

It’s worth spending some time thinking about ways same-sex marriage rights could raise legal questions for traditional religious communities.

One question that has received a fair amount of attention is whether a church or pastor can be legally compelled to perform a same-sex wedding or to admit members married contrary to the beliefs of that religious tradition. This is an issue on which—at least at this point—there seems to be widespread agreement. The Supreme Court has interpreted the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment to prevent government interference with a church’s determination of doctrine, selection of ministers, and internal government and discipline. Most people involved in this issue agree that the Religion Clauses protect a church or pastor against compulsion to violate sincerely held religious beliefs in these contexts.

Considerable protection also exists in this country for freedom of religious speech, though not complete protection. In many situations, those with religious objections to same-sex marriage should be able to voice their opinions without fearing the reaction of the government. Of course, the First Amendment does not protect a person against private reactions. Someone who speaks out on this issue might experience consequences in the workplace or in other non-governmental settings. Even in cases where the First Amendment does apply, there will be difficult cases at the margins. For instance, there may be tough cases concerning free speech rights of government employees.

While there are reasonably strong protections for churches and in some contexts for religious speakers, the law gets a good bit more complicated and less protective when the government regulates conduct. The baseline rule is that the government can regulate religiously-motivated conduct through general laws that do not target religious believers. In *Employment Division v. Smith* (1990) the Court decided that Oregon could enforce a law against peyote use and did not have to grant an exemption for members of a Native American church to use peyote in a religious ceremony. Based on *Smith*, the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment would not prevent the government from enforcing generally applicable anti-discrimination laws against those who claim

compliance would violate their religious beliefs. Even before *Smith*, in a decision alluded to in Chief Justice Roberts's *Obergefell* dissent, the Supreme Court allowed the IRS to revoke the tax-exempt status of a school that prohibited interracial dating on religious grounds. In that case, *Bob Jones University v. United States* (1983), the Court found that the government had a compelling interest in eradicating racial discrimination that overrode the school's claims based on free exercise of religion. Under *Smith*'s no-exemption principle one can easily envision potential legal conflicts arising in areas like employee benefits or provision of services by religious schools, charities or wedding-related businesses.

The *Smith* decision was very unpopular at the time and resulted in bipartisan federal legislation designed to enhance protection for religious freedom. Under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (1993) (RFRA), if the federal government substantially burdens a person's exercise of religion, an exemption must be granted unless the burden is the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling government interest. This was the statute the Supreme Court applied to protect Hobby Lobby and the Little Sisters of the Poor against the Obamacare contraceptive mandate. RFRA passed unanimously in the House and in the Senate by a 97–3 vote. Many states adopted comparable rules through legislation or interpretation of state constitutions.

Some religious freedom advocates hope state RFRA will protect believers from laws requiring conduct in tension with their religious beliefs. However, after *Obergefell*, religious freedom principles that were once the subject of bipartisan consensus have now become politically controversial. Further, it is not clear RFRA principles would necessarily shield believers in all contexts. For instance, a Washington state court ruled that RFRA-like principles did not protect a florist who claimed her sincere religious beliefs prevented her from providing flowers for the same-sex wedding of a long-time customer.

I want this essay to be longer on information than advice, but let me close with some New Testament passages that seem relevant as we sort through these issues. First, passages like 1 Corinthians 5 seem to clearly teach that we should interact differently with members of the church than our unchurched neighbors. That should influence how we understand what it means to walk wisely among those who live around us.

Second, it's worth recalling that the political divisions in Jesus's day were starker and more dangerous than those we face. We should therefore pay attention to how Jesus navigated treacherous political minefields, such as the question in Luke 20 of whether to pay taxes to Caesar. It's interesting that Jesus never directly answers the question he is asked. He never utters the sound bite that will justify denouncing him to the Roman authorities, but he also never utters the sound bite that will undermine his credibility with devout Jews. He instead reframes the issue, refusing to let his political adversaries force him into their trap. Jesus teaches us not to be too predictable. We should not allow the secular culture to define the available options, but should think deeply about how we can respond in faithful yet surprising ways that undermine some of the stereotypes driving the culture wars.

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Servant Thoughts

Ministry to Those with Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Confusion

by Timothy J. Geiger

One might assume that there is no subject too controversial to discuss in the twenty-first century.¹ Social mores have fallen right and left over the previous three decades, to the extent that nothing seems shocking anymore.

Yet there are two topics that may seem too tender to touch, particularly in the Reformed church: sex and gender confusion. The reasons for this are many and diverse, and the purpose of this article is not to debate them. As a pastor, and as the leader of a para-church ministry that interacts with thousands of sexually-struggling and confused Christians annually, I make a singular appeal: we in the Reformed church *must* talk about sexual sin and sexual struggles among the members of our churches.

Here are three simple reasons why leaders must address same-sex attraction and gender confusion, in particular:

1. Scripture plainly tells us that temptation to sin of a sexual nature is a *common* temptation—whether that particular temptation is to sin of a heterosexual, homosexual, or transgender nature. Not every Christian will experience temptation to all possible types of sexual sin, but every Christian will experience temptation to at least one of them. One citation that illustrates this point is 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.”

2. If the church is silent about biblical sexuality, sexual sin, and repentance, and the fact that it is common for those in the church to struggle sexually, it misses an opportunity to address one of the chief ways in which church members and their families fall into idolatry and unbelief. There is not a member of a Reformed church anywhere in the Western world who is not bombarded daily with sexualized images and enticements to sexual sin. Our members—particularly those under the age of thirty—are developing worldviews regarding sex, sexuality, and gender which are radically at odds with Scripture. We *must* speak the truth in love into the often-silent spiritual battle being waged in the hearts of our members.

3. Sin of a sexual nature is *already* part of the church. It should no longer be the priority of church officers and leaders to build a high wall to keep sin out of the church. It is already here, and has been here for longer than we think.² We must actively call our

¹ This article is based on an address given at the pre-assembly conference on June 8, 2016, entitled “Marriage, Sexuality, and Faithful Witness,” sponsored by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

² Numerous citations in Scripture humbly remind us that sin of a sexual nature, including homosexual behavior and gender-confused behavior, was a major problem among both Old Testament and New Testament believers.

members stuck in patterns of secret sexual sin to walk in faith and repentance. We, as their leaders and brothers and sisters, have a covenantal obligation and privilege to do so.³ I should note that the object of this holy ministry of discipleship is to restore the brother or sister to God and to the church.

COMMON OBSTACLES FOR SEXUAL STRUGGLERS IN THE CHURCH

Sean⁴ sat in my office, visibly shaken. As he told me the story of his thirty-year struggle with same-sex attraction and secret homosexual behavior, he didn't once look up from the floor. With his wife's discovery of his sin last week, Sean sat convinced that his marriage, family, career, and reputation were all lost.

Sean had been a deacon and an active member of his church for years. So, I asked him why he never asked anyone in his church for help. After all, he was a member of a larger church with plenty of pastoral and counseling resources.

The answer came after a moment of thought: "I was afraid."

"I was afraid" hardly took me by surprise. As a matter of fact, it's the response that roughly 90 percent of people give when asked that same question. But what was Sean afraid of?

The same things that many people fear. Some are valid; others, irrational. Regardless of the facts, to the Christian earnestly struggling with same-sex attraction or gender confusion, these fears constitute reality. Pastors and other leaders need to be aware of these fears in order to publicly minimize them, thereby making the gateway to confession and repentance as wide as possible.

Here is a list of twelve common sources of fear that often paralyze sexual strugglers in the church:

1. Shame. Not all shame is bad, but this shame is distorted, disproportionate, and crippling. Strugglers generally believe that they have sinned so greatly that they have no means of redemption.

2. Guilt. Guilt not so much over specific sinful acts, but a pervasive, overwhelming sense of guilt that leads the struggler to feel hopelessly separated from God.

3. Fear of exposure. Control is a significant feature in the lives of secret sexual strugglers. To many, exposure of the sin equates to a loss of control and the ability to carefully maintain the struggler's façade, often crafted to mask the underlying struggle.

4. Fear of judgment. Also known as "fear of man." The opinions of others are disproportionately important for many secret sexual strugglers. Consequently, the potential to be judged by another⁵ is too great a risk to take.

5. Culture of deception and self-deception. Secret sexual strugglers have generally kept their struggle secret for years, perhaps decades, through an intensive series of lies and other deceitful activities aimed both at others—to keep them unaware of the struggle (or the extent of the struggle), and at themselves, to justify their behavior.

³ See Galatians 6:1–2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14.

⁴ Not his real name.

⁵ The fear of judgment is linked directly to the struggler's sense of identity. To have that carefully constructed identity challenged through the judgment of another is tantamount to being told, "You're worthless," or, "You're a fraud." One way pastors and leaders may combat this fear is to teach, preach and counsel strongly and consistently that one's true identity comes from God alone (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20).

6. Saying, “I’m the only one. No one else in the church struggles like this.”

Same-sex and gender strugglers often perceive that no one else in the church struggles with these issues.⁶ This reinforces the already-present feeling that they are different than others, and if different, then they are alone.

7. Saying, “Real Christians don’t struggle with sin of a sexual nature.” The same-sex or gender struggler often believes that he or she may not be an authentic Christian, inferring (incorrectly) that one mark of genuine faith is the absence of serious, even life-dominating sin patterns.⁷

8. Believing that same-sex attraction, homosexual sin, and gender confusion are worse than other types of sin. This conclusion is generally drawn either from the experience of personal guilt and shame, and/or a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:18.⁸

9. Fear of church discipline. There may be the fear that confession of sin will automatically lead to the exercise of discipline in the church, which the struggler anticipates will be shaming.

10. Prior, unsuccessful attempts at change. Those struggling with same-sex attraction or gender confusion often report the onset of their attraction and/or struggle around age eleven. So, the average forty-year-old adult who struggles will have been battling this temptation and sin (unsuccessfully) for nearly thirty years. That long of a struggle will often prove disheartening and will make the struggler less liable to attempt to walk in repentance again.

11. A functional misunderstanding of grace. Many secret strugglers will not understand the nature or extent of God’s grace. Because of their own “track record” in pleasing the Lord, they generally perceive that God’s grace both to save and to refrain from sin operates differently for them than it does for others.

12. Misunderstanding the *real* problem. Virtually all sexual strugglers view their problem as being behavioral in nature. In reality, the behavior is merely the fruit of the real problem, which is idolatry, located in the heart.⁹

Hopefully as you’ve read through this list of common obstacles to sexual strugglers coming forward for help, you’ve begun to think of some ways to circumvent these

⁶ In fact, they are not alone. Studies have shown that as many as 11% of adolescents and young adults struggle with significant same-sex attraction (G. Remafedi, “Demography of Sexual Orientation in Adolescents,” *Pediatrics*, 89(4) (April, 1992): 714–721). Scientifically reliable estimates of transgender individuals don’t exist to my knowledge, primarily because persons experiencing gender dysphoria (the clinical name for gender confusion) are generally more “closeted” than those experiencing same-sex attraction. However, one estimate cited by ABC News was that there are approximately 700,000 transgender individuals in the United States: about two-tenths of one percent of the population (*7 Questions Answered about Transgender People*, Mary Kathryn Burke, posted on abcnews.go.com on 08/15/2015 and accessed on 07/02/2016).

⁷ The Apostle Paul authored 2 Corinthians to Christians (“To the church of God . . . with all the saints,” 1:1) but lamented with grave warning near the end of the letter that there were some in the church who refused to repent of sexual sin (12:21). WCF 17.3 states that it is possible for Christians to “fall into grievous sins, for a time, and continue therein.”

⁸ The limits of this article do not permit a full discussion of this point. Suffice it to say that sin of a sexual nature has different consequences for the individual and the church, as it does specific violence to God’s covenant of grace. This does present particular pastoral challenges. However, there is nothing in Scripture indicating that sin of a sexual nature is forensically worse in God’s eyes than any other kind of sin.

⁹ Matthew 15:18–20; Luke 6:43–45.

obstacles in your own church. I'll share a few concrete ways to break down these barriers later in this article. You may find others on our website at harvestusa.org.

WHAT IS THE REAL PROBLEM?

To begin to help someone is to understand the nature of their struggle. And to do that, we need to move past the superficial manifestations of sinful behavior in one's life.

Treating sin is a bit like treating an illness. While there are times you treat symptoms, a doctor will generally treat the underlying cause of those symptoms. To refuse to treat the underlying cause will only lead to a recurrence of those symptoms—or ones that are even more troubling.

Scripture indicates that the cause of sinful behavior—the “sin behind the sin,” if you will—is idolatry. In Luke 6:43–45, Jesus tells us that it shouldn't surprise us when we see sinful behavior in the lives of others; it is merely the overflow of that which controls their heart.

Seeing idolatry as the primary problem to be addressed pastorally doesn't excuse the sinfulness, or the consequences of outward sinful behavior. It does, however, give pastors, leaders, and strugglers a “root” sin to focus on, rather than only dealing with the superficial manifestations of that sin. After all, if you merely pull off the part of the weed you see above ground, the weed will grow back—and quickly. But if you pull out the root, the leaves and fruit come along with it—and it will not return.

What are some of the underlying idols that lead to sinful behavior of a sexual nature? They are common idols, and in and of themselves, in their proper context, they are generally good desires. Good desires that, in our sinful seeking for self-importance and self-worship, become disordered. To quote Tim Keller,¹⁰ the otherwise good desire becomes for us an ultimate desire, which must be satisfied, no matter the cost. That is when the desire becomes an idol.

Some of these common idols are: love, a positive self-image, affirmation, affection, security, freedom from pain or suffering, control, comfort, being understood, and intimacy. Sin of a sexual nature can give a plausible counterfeit that these desires are being satisfied (albeit in ungodly ways). To the extent they are truly idols for us, we make excuses to justify our need, and therefore, our behavior.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO HELP SEXUAL STRUGGLERS

Each one of the following measures is only effective to the extent that it takes place within the context of an authentic relationship with you or with someone else in the church. The goal of this ministry must be reconciliation: leading the sinner to become a more fully-engaged, fully functional member of the church. That goal is reached only through the medium of real, authentic, life-on-life relationship with another brother or sister in the church.¹¹

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (London: Penguin, 2009), ix.

¹¹ We encourage that male sexual strugglers work with male leaders and mentors, and that female strugglers work with female leaders and mentors. This follows the biblical model for discipleship explained in Titus 2:2–6.

Here are concrete action steps you can take in your church both to encourage secret sexual strugglers to come into the light, and then to help them walk in repentance.

1. **Focus on discipleship.** If the real issue to deal with is idolatry, then the real place to begin is with discipleship. Focus in your discipleship relationship not merely on knowing *facts*, but on the *experiential reality of those facts in the life of the believer*. In other words, help the struggler to wrestle with the question: “What difference does the life, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus Christ make for me in the particular areas in which I struggle?” Help the struggler to understand his or her major idols, and then work through particular strategies to see Jesus as strong and able to help when those specific desires cry out to be satisfied.

2. **Model and expect proactive accountability.** Accountability isn’t supposed to be purely reactive in nature (“This is what I’ve done”); it is supposed to be *proactive*, and as such, it is meant to head off sin in the first place (“This is what I’m feeling and where I’m making room in my life for sin”). Here are some questions to ask in the course of practicing proactive accountability with a sexual struggler:

- a. What are the idols that are controlling my heart, thoughts, and desires today?
- b. In what particular ways am I making room in my life for sin today?
- c. In what particular ways do I need to be severe in cutting off the means to sin in my life today?
- d. In what particular ways am I consciously denying the sovereignty of God over my life today?
- e. In what particular ways am I refusing to submit myself to the ordinary means of grace¹² for help in my struggle against sin today?

3. **Make repeated invitations for your church’s sexual strugglers to come forward for help.** Keep in mind all of the obstacles mentioned earlier. Make repeated invitations publicly and privately in your preaching, teaching, announcements, and personal conversations for people to come forward to you (or specific others in the church) for help. Communicate that your church is a safe place for people to be broken and to seek repentance.

4. **Offer training to your church officers, women leaders, and other non-ordained leaders to help.** There are any number of resources that are helpful; you can contact us at harvestusa.org for specific suggestions. Any resources you use should equip your leaders to engage with strugglers at a heart level (i.e., talking more about idols than behavior) and should equip your leaders to engage in ongoing relationship (discipleship) with strugglers.

5. **Make it an expectation in your church that everyone is involved in some sort of small group fellowship.** This might include home groups, men’s or women’s groups, or cell groups—but make it a church-wide expectation that everyone is under the care and within the view of an elder or another trusted, mature leader. It’s much more difficult to remain isolated and in secret sin when you’re in close fellowships with others.

6. **Intentionally create discipleship relationships in your church.** Match up more mature men with younger men and more mature women with younger women (*vis a vis*

¹² The term “ordinary means of grace” as used here includes, but is not limited to: reading and meditating on Scripture, prayer, confession of sin, fellowship, accountability, participation in private and public worship.

Titus 2) for discipleship relationships. Before doing so, provide training for your mentors/disciples and then provide ongoing support and encouragement for them.

7. **Offer a confidential ministry for sexual strugglers in your church.** Not an addictions ministry or a twelve-step program, but a facilitated, peer-support group with a focus on life-on-life discipleship.¹³

8. **Pray.** Pray yourself, and ask a group of men and women in your church to gather together to pray on a regular basis that the Lord would bring forward members and attenders caught in secret sexual sin—and that when they do come forward, you and the rest of the church would be ready and able to help.

9. **Be patient.** A struggle with same-sex attraction or with gender confusion generally has a long, complex, and painful history. It is not easily overcome. Temptation, and actual struggles with that temptation, may never go away completely. Even if they do, it will likely take a long time. So, be patient with the sinner, as Paul exhorts us in 1 Thessalonians 5:11. And, restore him or her gently, as Paul exhorts in Galatians 6:1.

As you are no doubt aware, this is a complex and long-duration issue for the church to handle. Yet we must handle it, since one of the chief objectives of the church is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to [maturity]” (Eph. 4:12–13).

There are many resources available to you for help in this task, Harvest USA among them. But the church’s chief resource is the Holy Spirit, who works to sanctify his people and to give them the grace and wisdom necessary for discipleship. Ask for that grace and wisdom from him. He will not withhold it from you.

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¹³ Harvest USA can help your church, no matter how large or small, start an intentional ministry to function as an outworking of your ordinary pastoral oversight. Contact us at harvestusa.org to find out how.

ServantReading

Sexuality These Days

A Review Article

by Stephen J. Tracey

The Gospel and Sexual Orientation: A Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, edited by Michael LeFebvre. Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant and the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 2012, 67 pages, \$6.00, paper.

Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ, by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2015, 206 pages, \$7.00, paper. (Also available in Kindle.)

We use the word “sex” in two ways. The first, and usual, meaning refers to sexual activity. We also use the word to refer to gender, “the male sex,” “the female sex.” Many Christians are still bewildered over the recent decision of the Supreme Court regarding same-sex marriage and in response are trying to defend the fundamental principles of marriage in terms of one man and one woman. Meanwhile, social discourse has moved further along the LGBT alphabet, seeking to abolish any male/female distinction, and arguing for gender fluidity. The fundamental distinction of male and female has come under attack; the debate has shifted to sex in terms of gender and the abolition of the dimorphic order. While Christians are still thinking about how to respond to the question of homosexual marriage, society is struggling to understand issues of transgender, or gender fluidity.

Sex as Sexual Activity

A few years ago I had the privilege of being involved in campus outreach to Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine. The College is proud of many things, one of which is the Bowdoin Orient, “The Nation’s Oldest Continuously Published College Weekly.” On February 19, 2010, an article appeared chronicling the work of *Bowdoin Christian Fellowship*, stating not only that the fellowship has been “exceptionally active on campus this semester,” but also that the group is “experiencing a marked growth in membership.” However, a few pages into the newspaper, one is greeted with the following headline: *Let’s talk sex, baby: Top 10 reasons to do the deed by Natalia Richey, Columnist.*

Richey’s view is that since we are all different, we therefore approach sex in different ways. She then says, “I often receive strange, and surprised stares when I make this

claim, especially from those who have decided that sex comes with a rule book about when, why, where, with who and for what reasons we should have it.”¹

And there you have it, sex these days—there are no rules. There are no rules about when you have sex, why you have sex, where you have sex, or with whom you have sex. There are not even any rules about reasons you have sex. Anything goes. It is my body, and I’ll do what I want—I’ll do what I like. Life is all about me, what I want, what pleases me. This view of sex treats other people as objects. Ironically sex without rules may appear to be about freedom, but it can very quickly descend to abuse. The word “abuse” is a powerful word in our culture. The power of that word reflects the fact that for many people sex is contaminated; they have been violated. Their sexuality has been misshapen, misdirected, and harmed by others. Sex has become a complex darkness. Here is what David Powlison says:

Sex can become very distasteful. Pawing, seduction, bullying, predation, attack, betrayal, and abandonment are among the many ways that sex becomes stained by sufferings at the hands of others. When you’ve been treated like an object, the mere thought of the act can produce tense torment. Sexual darkness is not always lust; sometimes it is fear, pain, haunting memories. If immoral fantasies bring one poison into sex, then nightmarish memories infiltrate a different poison. The arena for trusting friendship can become a prison of mistrust. The experience of violation can leave the victim self-labeled as “damaged goods.” Sex becomes intrinsically dirty, shameful, dangerous. Even in marriage, it can become an unpleasant duty, a necessary evil, not the delightful convergence of duty and desire.²

Sex as Gender and Identity

What about the other idea of sex and of sexuality, that of identity? Princeton Theological Seminary recently hosted a conference entitled “Gender Benders: Theology and Gender Fluidity” to explore so called “gender fluidity” and how people are “forging new gender identities” outside the norms of male and female. One of the organizers, Jacqueline Lapsley, said, “[G]ender identity is a topic of great interest today, especially for young people. They are questioning the gender binaries—male and female—and some are forging new gender identities in accordance with their self-understanding.”³

And there you have it, sex these days—gender identity is my own choice. In a recent blog post entitled *Your Soul for—A Pronoun?* Dr. Peter Jones said, “The new Western progressive view of sexuality claims that there are no given sexual identities.” Individuals creates their own sexual self-definition. He then gave several examples of recent sexual self-determination:

¹ Natalia Richey, “Let’s Talk Sex, Baby: Top 10 Reasons to Do the Deed,” *The Bowdoin Orient* 139, no. 16 (February 19, 2010): 7.

² David Powlison, “Making All Things New: Restoring Pure Joy to the Sexually Broken,” *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 71.

³ Michael Gryboski, “Princeton Theological Seminary’s ‘Gender Bender’ Conference Goes against God’s Design Says Former Graduate,” *Christian Post* 22 (March 2016), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/princetontheologicalseminarysgenderbenderfluidityconferenceagainstgodsdesignbible159679/>.

A 60-something Bruce Jenner, one of the world's greatest male athletes, has fashioned himself as a 30-something female pin-up who recently won the ESPN Arthur Ashe athletic award for courage; In Toronto, a 6' 2", 46-year-old father has convinced himself that he is a 6-year-old girl, with the blessing of the Metropolitan Christian Church; At a 2016 United Methodist forum for their VBS programs, the Reconciling Ministries Network demanded workers to "drop the gender binary" by avoiding such offensive language as "boys and girls"; In the UK the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England for school-children between 13 and 18 asked students to complete a questionnaire choosing from 22 "gender types," included (sic) "gender non-conforming," "tri-gender" and "gender fluid."⁴

Crown and Covenant Publications has produced two very helpful books that speak to this issue of sexuality. While they cover the same ground, often making the same points, they do so in very different ways. *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation: A Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, edited by Michael LeFebvre, is a small book based on a report to the synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and it retains some of its church-report shape. Yet this in no way detracts from the helpfulness of the book. It contains helpful insights and guidance to the pastoral care of those struggling with questions of sexual identity. It is not merely a clerical report, it is a pastoral report.

Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ, by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, is more of a personal confessional-reflecting kind of book, continuing on from her previous book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. In many ways, reading the two reviewed books together was just as important to my thinking as reading them separately. On the one hand is a report of a church court, not dry as dust and weighed down in church-speak, but scriptural and full of pastoral wisdom. On the other hand is the personal report of one who is a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and that personal account not only oozes humanity, but the gospel comes welling up into that messy kitchen-table, backyard, yearning-for-community humanity. Both books are a must-read for officers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The Gospel and Sexual Orientation

The Gospel and Sexual Orientation begins with an excellent introduction to the issues facing the church from the proponents of the new perspective on same-sex issues. These proponents argue that "same-sex desires are . . . not a matter of moral choices, but are a natural disposition—a legitimate sexual identity" (6). In a careful discussion of issues of biology (are there physiological causes for same-sex desires?), the report notes that "even if it were to be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that some people possess a same-sex orientation through biological or sociological factors outside their own control, this would not indicate that homosexuality is part of God's intended order" (20). Sexual

⁴ Peter Jones, "Your Soul For—A Pronoun?" truthXchange, posted on Feb 23, 2016, <https://truthxchange.com/articles/2016/02/23/your-soul-for-a-pronoun/> (accessed April 4, 2016).

identity is included in the “all parts and faculties of soul and body,” WCF 6.2–3, disordered by original sin.

The next section summarizes questions of personality traits and the multiplication of gender categories. While many Christians are bewildered by the discussion on who may use which restrooms or locker rooms in public schools, we must be on our guard that we do not over-react. The report states:

The Church needs to be aware of these trends in our society . . . and then adds,

. . . it becomes increasingly important that the church be careful not to fall into the trap of treating “sensitive men” as less masculine or “strong women” as not feminine and thereby contributing to a sense of gender confusion and the resulting burden of individuals being given one of society’s new gender identities. (27)

From these introductory points, helping to explain the confusion evident in our culture, the report moves to scriptural and confessional statements, leaning heavily on the work of Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective*, and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*.⁵

The final section helpfully states that “homosexuality is not just an issue to understand, it is a struggle experienced by real people” (57). There is a very helpful balance between recognizing the need to evangelize unbelievers and the need to disciple Christ’s flock. The desire in giving some pastoral guidelines is for the sake of “improving our ministry as Christ’s church to men and women with same-sex tendencies” (58). The guidelines are general, yet applied to issues of same-sex temptations.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has done us a great service and greatly helped the church in the work of mutual edification and gospel witness.

Openness Unhindered

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield’s book is a most beautiful book. Not only is it well researched, and timely, it is well written: the author uses words artfully. This is clear even from the choice of title. *Openness Unhindered* comes from Acts 28:31 where Paul, in Rome, was “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (NASB). Such gospel openness is usually met with hostility, and surely Rosaria Butterfield has faced her share of that. Yet there is a glorious truth here: God’s gospel should be stated openly, and, if it pleases God, it shall be unhindered. Concerning the title, Butterfield says:

I have come to understand ‘openness, unhindered’ as tidings that, in their biblical context, outline Christ’s posture for the forgiveness of sexual sin and the renewal that he gives to the body and the mind. My prayer is that this book will serve as a bridge to Christ for those of us whose sin (sexual and otherwise) has clobbered us more times than we can count, and for our churches and Christian friends who want to help but don’t know where to begin or what to say. (2)

⁵ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

Butterfield begins by suggesting three lenses through which people view sexuality, 1. rejecting Scripture; 2. accepting Scripture but misapplying it by believing the struggle is the sin; or 3. accepting Scripture, but supplementing it with the “moral logic” of experience or the culture in which we live. This part of her book was reprinted in the March 2016 edition of *New Horizons*.⁶ It is a helpful way of focusing discussion. The second lens exposes how Christians are often insensitive to the struggles of same-sex temptation. The third lens exposes the dangers of abandoning *sola Scriptura* for *sola experientia*. Many believers now frame their life not by the Word of God alone, but by the principle that one’s own life experience may validate and explain the human condition.

After summarizing her conversion to Christ, Butterfield goes straight to the issue of identity. Here she skillfully shows that seeking identity in anything other than Christ leads to a blurred view of self, of the world, and of God. In a later chapter she discusses the origin and power of the idea of “sexual orientation” and draws this conclusion, “The category of sexual orientation carries with it a cosmology of personhood that undervalues image bearers of a holy God” (95). Or again, “Sexuality moved from verb (practice) to noun (people), and with this grammatical move, a new concept of humanity was born—the idea that we are *oriented* or framed by our sexual desires” (97). Or again, “Prior to the nineteenth-century category invention of sexual orientation, no one’s sexual practice or sexual desire prescribed personhood or defined their personal identity” (97). That is why it is vitally important to understand the principles of identity in terms of union with Christ.

What Butterfield does is to take the good and glorious doctrines of the old story and bring them into sharp focus on the landscape of sexuality. Here is a clear statement of sexuality as it relates to the doctrines of original sin, of union with Christ, of sanctification, and of repentance. While her statement of original sin does not discuss the idea of the imputation of Adam’s sin, she is very clear on the reason the doctrine is vital:

My fear is that the use of the term *sexual orientation* when used as a morally neutral starting point for a conversation about biblical sexuality muddies the water about what Original Sin really means. It forgets that Original Sin is everyone’s preexisting condition. (126)

In the middle of a section on sanctification and repentance, Butterfield writes, “One reason I am writing this book is that I believe we need a more stalwart understanding of sin, repentance, and sanctification to provide pastoral care to all people struggling with unwanted sexual temptations” (56). Her careful statements of sin, repentance, and sanctification go a long way in helping the church to speak the gospel with wisdom and gentleness. Speaking of the benefits of union with Christ, she says, “One more crucial gift that identity in Christ bequeaths is it gives me a way to defend myself against Satan’s accusations. Union with Christ is part of the saints’ armor” (40). Here, in the midst of the struggle with sin, this identity in Christ is the true story, the true experience of every

⁶ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, “Three Lenses Through Which People View Sexuality,” *New Horizons* 37, no. 3 (March 2016): 5.

believer. Many well-meaning Christians often forget that sanctification is not an act of God's free grace, but a work of God's free grace. The result of forgetting this distinction is that we foolishly expect people to no longer face temptation. Butterfield observes:

Sometimes when I speak to church and college audiences, I am asked if I am healed. Sometimes the person asking the question will say: "God does not make people gay. So if your homosexual desire does not disappear in this lifetime, then you are either not a believer or not praying hard enough." Both the use of the term "healing" and the "pray the gay away" philosophy strike an unbiblical chord to me, and I said that to my questioner. (55)

She is right, these are unbiblical chords.

There are also well-meaning Christians who love the doctrine of grace, but somehow bypass repentance to get to grace. Repentance, I suppose, sounds too much like law, and not grace. They argue that we should certainly admit sin, and then cry for more grace. Butterfield shows that admitting sin and confessing sin is not the same thing. "Confession of sin is meant to drive us to Christ. But Christians who indulge the habit of admitting rather than confessing sin over time tend not to see their sin as sin at all. It just seems like life" (70).

Community

The last chapter of Butterfield's book expresses the human yearning for community. The church, of course, fulfills that, but, as on my grade school reports, there is a could-do-better note. One of the best things about this book is the foundational place given to the ordinary means of grace. One finishes with a sense that the church of the Lord Jesus is well equipped to speak into the world the glorious gospel of Jesus. This is not a hunker-down and circle-the-wagons time. This is an age of opportunity, for preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness. Shall it be unhindered? That is in God's hands.

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ServantReading

What Is Marriage? *by Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George*

by Joel Carini

What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense, by Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George. New York: Encounter Books, 2012, xiv + 135 pages, \$15.99, paper.

By now, it is old news that the United States, by judicial decree, defines marriage as a legal union of two people, regardless of gender. Christians oppose this judgment because it is directly contrary to the biblical definition of marriage. We also presume that the redefinition of marriage will harm many people, not only by infringing on religious liberty, but by directly changing the very structure of families. But how are we to make this case in the public square? The authority of the Bible is not recognized by many Americans, and especially not by most of those on the other side of the debate. How can we persuade them that the traditional definition of marriage is not only correct but also good for society?

In *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*, Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George offer a cogent defense of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, by an argument that does not assume religious faith.¹ They begin by contrasting two views of marriage. The *revisionist* view of marriage is that marriage is an *emotional* union of two people, i.e., a relationship constituted by the emotions of the two people toward each other. The *conjugal* view of marriage is that marriage is a *comprehensive* union, i.e., a union at every level of a couple's being, consummated by the sexual act.

Both sides of the current debate on marriage agree that marriage is a relationship that requires legal recognition, that marriage has a connection to sex, and that marriage is monogamous, permanent, and exclusive. But, the authors ask in chapter 1, how do any of those norms follow from the revisionist view? In most relationships, the more intimate a relationship, the less likely it is that a relationship will require public, legal recognition. (Would anyone want the state governing our friendships?) If what is essential to marriage is emotional union, even sex is unnecessary to marriage because emotional union can be fostered by other joint activities. Since emotions are unstable and not limited to a single relationship, why should marriage, an emotional union, be permanent and exclusive? In each case, the revisionist view of marriage cannot make sense of the very relationship for which it argues.

What is the alternative view of marriage that makes sense of these norms? In chapter

¹ Justice Samuel Alito cited the book in his dissent from the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Windsor*, 133 S.Ct. 2675 (2013), which overturned the Defense of Marriage Act.

2, Girgis, Anderson, and George argue that these norms are accounted for by the conjugal view of marriage. On this view, marriage unites two people not only on the emotional and spiritual level, but even on a physical level. Just as the parts of a single body work together for a single biological end, life, so the bodies of a man and a woman can work together toward the biological end of new life. It is this physical union between a man and a woman that makes possible a unique comprehensive union of two people, marriage. Marriage is a *comprehensive union* of a man and a woman, a union on every level of their being.

The conjugal view of marriage makes sense of all the norms that the revisionist view could not explain. Permanence, exclusivity, and monogamy follow from the comprehensiveness of the marital union. Marriage's connection to sex, childbearing, and child rearing is obvious in the conjugal view. And the need for legal recognition follows from the objective structure and comprehensive nature of the marriage relationship.

In the remaining chapters of the book, Girgis, Anderson, and George explore the state's relationship to marriage, the harms of redefining marriage, objections to their case on the basis of justice and equality, and others on the basis of the needs and fulfillment of same-sex attracted people. In every case, they demonstrate the reasonableness of the conjugal view of marriage and the benefits that its recognition brings about.

The book's argument is compelling and exhaustive. The authors build a compelling case for the rationality of what is, in essence, the biblical definition of marriage, marriage as a one-flesh union of man and woman, built into the very design of our bodies by our creator. They deal with objections fairly and reasonably. Many Christians will ask whether this book capitulates to the secular worldview by making a purportedly secular argument. However, I would urge that readers consider whether this book's argument is in fact an exploration of the very rationality of the biblical description of marriage.

Why should a pastor read this book? In a nation of genderless marriage, more and more pastors will have to labor to show their congregations and the world around them that the biblical definition of marriage makes sense and is good for society. *What Is Marriage?* helps uncover the worldview that underlies this new definition of marriage, and it shows the superiority of the biblical, conjugal view of marriage. The young people in our churches especially are bombarded with the propaganda of genderless marriage and need to understand why it falls so far short of the truth and the human good.

Furthermore, religious liberty challenges will continue in the coming months and years. Those who hold to the traditional definition of marriage and intend to live according to it may be able to achieve religious exemptions from recognition of and participation in same-sex marriages, but it will be an uneasy compromise. The worldview of personal autonomy and fulfillment that has driven the marriage revolution will eventually crush dissent in the United States (as has happened to some degree in Canada), unless traditionalists go beyond arguing that their private religious views be respected to arguing that the traditional definition of marriage is good for and necessary for the flourishing of society.

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Servant Poetry

John Milton (1608–1674)

On His Blindness

WHEN I consider how my light is spent
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, least he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his milde yoaik, they serve him best, his State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and waite.