

Pastoral Charity Does Not Excuse Us From Seeking the Truth

The Quest for Same-Sex Unions Touches Us Deeply

People who not only claim to be Christians but also live the Christian life have accepted to be bound by Jesus' commandment to love their neighbor as themselves, in addition to loving God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. Like Jesus, they must be devoted to each other and kind to every person; while they also cling firmly to the truth about both God and man. Those engaged in ministry to others are bound, after the example of Jesus, to practice pastoral charity, the dedicated love, service, and concern of the shepherd. Pastoral charity, as we see it in Jesus himself, includes compassion to individual persons in their weakness combined with firm and unequivocal teaching of the truth. Jesus never said to a sinner, "Your inclination or attraction is so strong and you've had it from so young, that it's your orientation; so it's God's plan for you. I bless you and your condition – go and be happy." With Jesus, it was always, "Your faith has saved you. Go, and sin no more." Sometimes, He even added, "or something worse may happen to you." Pastoral charity consists of a two-pronged approach: show compassion and understanding to the person, but be uncompromising with the truth of the situation and of what God expects of us all.

It is not only modern societies that have changed; we have changed too. A statement of the obvious, you might think. Societal and attitudinal change is very relevant to what is currently taking place among us over the issues related to what is being called the debate or dialogue over the drive to legislate same-sex marriage. Since the arguments of Greek philosophers 2,500 years ago, thinkers, writers, artists, or other individuals have at various times spoken on behalf of homosexual practices. However, these expressions were usually an attempt to explain or justify oneself, or to clarify how they fit into the mainstream of society. Until now, individuals who chose to reject social standards realized they would stand out and accepted the consequences as a logical outcome. They were free to be different from the rest of society, and other people were free not to approve of their choice.

The past century has seen what is probably the first effort in civilized history by homosexuals to persuade public opinion to approve of, or at least tolerate, openly homosexual activity. It began with various attempts to use modern social, scientific, or psychological theories to establish a basis of legitimacy for the homosexual experience and lifestyle. Then, with the gradual development of what became – from the 1920's to the 1960's a "sexual revolution" that developed unevenly in different countries – a growing trend of men and women "came out of the closet" to reveal their affirmation of a homosexual lifestyle. They rightly demanded society stop persecuting homosexual individuals, and recognize and repent of the suffering caused by discrimination. Attitudes, words, acts, behavior, public policies, or anything else that attacks people in their human dignity is wrong, because such things attack what is fundamentally human in all of us. Therefore, it is right and good to demand the end of all kinds of unfair treatment directed at anyone. Every human being deserves respect.

However, respect of a person does not require approval of his personal choices or behavior. Parents truly love their children if they also discipline them. What kind of society would we have if lobbyists deprived parents of their right to direct the education and formation of their children? By analogy, a legitimate society has both the right and the duty to tag the behavior of all of its members to the common good, inasmuch as these behaviors are not truly private and personal but are publicly exposed to the society and have direct impact on the rest of the population and its institutions. Until recently, society held public display of sexual behavior, including homosexuality, as an undesirable influence on the young. The "sexual revolution" society seemed to surrender its right to regulate public behavior, at first turning a blind eye to public sexual behavior and then simply getting used to it, with local variations in tolerable limits. It was a small step to widen public tolerance for public homosexual behavior, and the entertainment industry has diligently labored to do so.

Finally, in recent years, we are seeing a new “offensive” aimed at social re-engineering: the changing of society’s levers for regulating social institutions and the formation of citizens. At this level, public resistance is stronger to change, but this also varies from country to country. Here in Canada, we seem to be willing to allow anyone to push just about anything through our legislatures and courts. I don’t see very many signs that we care very much about what constitutes human life, what values we want to prioritize as a society, and to what kind of life we want to form our children and young people. For thousands of years, people have considered marriage and family of enough importance to make them worth defending against any attack and all manipulation. Now, when they are weaker than perhaps ever before, we seem to be willing to surrender them to re-engineering by homosexual lobbyists without so much as a whimper.

I believe the principal reason is that most people feel caught in a bind. The “gay lobby” and those sympathetic to it have made such aggressive use of condemnatory epithets like “homophobia” and “intolerance” that most people just keep quiet and hope the problem will go away. It won’t. One argument used by the “gay lobby” to silence opposition is that the homosexual orientation is a genetic condition and not a choice; so their rights are identical to the rights people have by virtue of their race, color, or religion. It is nothing like race or color, which are visibly inscribed in the body. Much of the argumentation in defense of homosexuality as an orientation, which in turn impacts on religious and moral standards by re-reading and revising them, in effect makes of the homosexual orientation and accompanying lifestyle an equivalent or alternative religion. This is not unlike the situation that prevailed in the millennium which produced the Jewish Scriptures.

In effect then, what we have to contend with at present is a lobby that is trying to re-engineer our society’s political, judicial, social, and religious institutions by revising the representational, moral/ethical, relational, and scriptural principles upon which these are based. Politicians used to be expected to be able to defend the highest humanistic ideals and values, even if the population lost sight of them. Judges were expected to solidly found their decisions in wisdom not only on the laws of the land but also on the natural moral law common to all humanity, since human laws can easily enough overlook or omit key points relating to the common good of humanity. One real issue is the unacceptability of all social mistreatment of any person as a person, regardless of the motivation claimed by abusers. Another issue is how society is to maintain and fulfill its responsibility to open and form new citizens to the full depth of truth on the origin, meaning, purpose, dignity and destiny of the human person and of human life. We must assure respect for all our citizens in their human dignity; while at the same time actively promoting and defending the common good by, among other things, applying to every citizen the same expectations of decency, moderation, and responsibility.

As a pastor, I feel the anguish of Raymond Gravel quoted in a Gazette column “Priest strikes a nerve” August 7 by Elisabeth Kalbfuss. In trying to respect, accompany, and guide people who see themselves as gays and lesbians, we share their pain. The parliamentary initiative to attempt to equate same-sex unions to marriage opened a dialogue that touches me, as it may touch some of our readers, in these personal ways, but in others too. We are able to value the human person as long as we promote the common good and defend human life – especially the poor and weak. This extends to concern over formation of the young. We are duty bound to consider how redefining marriage will affect the access the young have to the full truth about their human nature and destiny.

Let’s not avoid exploring these issues in depth, nor passively endure as substitutes for seeking full truth any personal attack on those who disagree. One hallmark of totalitarian and fascist states was their dictatorial control of the organs of information. Whether it is political, military, financial or economic power that seizes or quietly exercises the control of information; the end result can be quite similar. It is the re-engineering of society and of the model of the acceptable or ideal citizen. Thank you, reporters in secular and religious press who contribute to this dialogue with honesty and transparency, and editors, owners, publishers, who open wide the forum for public debate.

August 5th *The Gazette's* Don MacPherson rightly brought attention to the troubled state of marriage as an institution today in Quebec, where couples are almost evenly split between stable married couples, divorced couples, and couples living in common law unions. As Don says, it is ironic that "the most Catholic of provinces" should have come to this, but I would add, quite understandable. While 83% of Quebecers in 2001 identified themselves as Roman Catholics; that claim alone doesn't confer the benefits of adhering to a faith, without the willingness to integrate religious principles into daily living in a consistent discipline or practice. It is no coincidence that Christian marriage has unraveled at about the same rate as that of the practice of the Christian faith in Quebec, as well as in other western nations.

Who Can Define the Human Person, Marriage, and Human Society?

The United Nations defined marriage and family as the basic unit of civil society, recognizing their own unique purpose for building up the common good of societies in every culture. In June the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in "Considerations on Unions Between Homosexual Persons." states that marriage is universally recognized as profoundly rooted in the complementarity of the sexes, and is therefore perfectly suited to rearing children into a full development of the same complementarity in themselves. As fundamental institutions for the common good of humanity; the state is duty bound to care for marriage and the family.

The young want to discover their full human destiny – they are entitled to actually hear the timeless witness of Jesus Christ to the full truth about woman and man. It is the truth about God's plan for a life of profound meaning and deep intimacy for woman with man, for them with others in society, and for a deep, transforming intimacy with God. We cannot find the truth without making room for what Jesus Christ has to say about the nature and destiny of our human life. Let the Church have its voice. It's a question of integrity, for everyone.

Though sometimes at fault in its pastors and members, the Roman Catholic Church has always valued individual conscience and honored any who defend their beliefs; insisting that people take their responsibility to inform their conscience with the full truth on human life, salvation, and God. Pope John Paul II has a very deep record of championing the cause of religious freedom and the dignity of the human person and civil society in all the nations he has visited these past 25 years, precisely as he had done in his homeland from his youth.

What Are Marriage and Family?

Every human person has a deep hunger for meaning, purpose, belonging, and happiness. Marriage is the most fundamental path people follow in their search, because it combines reciprocal love with the generation of new life. CDF issues a stern warning against equating same-sex unions with marriage because it would erode the influence marriage has with the young as the way for them to realize their full potential for fertile, complementary human love. Children are particularly vulnerable and therefore need responsible protection against whatever could deprive them of access to the full truth about the human condition, our origins, our destiny, and our dignity.

A same-sex union is a union, not a marriage. Nor is it a family, because for children to grow into their full destiny as human beings, they need to be raised by a both gender set of parents, precisely because the mother and father bring unique and irreplaceable characteristics to the formation of the child's psyche, conscience, gender identity, socialization, and personhood.

Until recently, there was almost no research at all done on what the father contributes to this rearing and forming of the children born of a marriage. Mothers generally were the ones to stay home and spend the countless hours needed for the complex process of forming children from the raw

material they are born with into creatures reasonably recognizable as civil, aware, human persons with a fully functioning and responsible conscience. As serious studies begin to come in, there is general surprise that fathers contribute a great deal to this process in the ancient model of the family: a stable union of one mother and one father.

Is Homosexuality a Normal and Equivalent Alternative Human Model?

Some pastors and Christians accuse people and institutions in both the Church and society at large of mistreating those who see themselves as homosexual. Every human being is entitled to enjoy the freedom and dignity inherent in our common humanity and to respect for their person. Any acts, words, or attitudes, which withhold that respect, are in fact reprehensible. On the other hand, society has the right and the duty to consider just as reprehensible anything that would attack the common good of the entire society or of the human race as a whole.

I believe that much of the debate over homosexuality is overtly about the denial of rights these citizens claim for themselves and their efforts to legitimize or to seek the legitimization of their condition and lifestyle. This overt debate, in which any who may disagree are often attacked or labelled as "homophobic", actually conceals and avoids the real and underlying question: is homosexuality a normal and equivalent alternative human model?

Some would argue that, for the majority, gays and lesbians have not made a "choice" to be so, but that it is a fundamental, "given" orientation they began to discover (even if they couldn't label it) from a very young age. On the other hand, significantly fewer gays and lesbians seemed to have made a "choice" based on the confusion and pain they experienced having been born into and raised in a traditional, husband-and-wife-led family, and/or based on the confusion and pain that came later in life from within an abusive, heterosexual marriage relationship. It is quite a compelling argument, coming from the experience of those suffering this condition, that they would not deliberately want to "choose" a sexual orientation that would de facto, make them unacceptable and open to persecution within mainstream society.

However, this line of reasoning prioritizes the personal experience and sentiments of those who struggle with their gender identity and sexual feelings to such an extent as to close discussion on the question about the legitimacy of homosexuality as a model for human life and deprive any society of legitimate means for favouring marriage and the family, for the common good.

Dialogue on Marriage Is Not an Attack on Homosexuals and Their Rights

The element of choice is not their choice of condition but rather their choice to give expression to it. We cannot help but refer to the "nature or nurture" debate, which itself demonstrates the difficulty in defining that very condition. Is homosexuality genetic in origin or is it something that develops after conception? I cannot bring myself as a Christian to accept the discourse developed over the past few decades which uses the term "orientation" in order to set up an equivalence in essence between that condition and the ordinary human dispositions which bring a man and a woman to form together a loving relationship which can lead them to marriage and even a Christian marriage if they are believers, and further still to a chaste Christian marriage if they give themselves to a lively, prayerful, devoted life of faith in the Lord.

Conceding this equivalence to the "orientation" of homosexuality contradicts divine revelation in the Sacred Scriptures, I believe, for try as I may, I have yet to find a single clear reference in the whole Bible where the Lord reveals to us his plan for such an equivalence. The Bible seems to me to be quite categorical, as Jesus was himself, about the Father's plan for human life and sexuality. In chapter 10 verses 6 to 9, as we find it in the Marriage ritual, Mark quotes the Lord: "Jesus said: 'From the

beginning of creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide."

I must admit that I have struggled with this text very much in recent years, as I observe more and more young people unable to leave father and mother as such, since these have separated and divorced already. We have not begun to plumb the depths of the far-reaching consequences of the disintegration of marriage and the family on the formation of the children of these families and their consciences. I find equally troubling the very low regard for even the concept of chastity in our present culture. It's as if some consider marriage a license to do practically anything, without realizing that any look, word, attitude or touch that reduces the other - even a spouse - to an object for my pleasure, is not only unchaste, but manipulative and damaging to both. The bitter fruit in the children of impure hearts is, I believe, all around us. This is not irrelevant to this conversation we are fraternally entertaining about the condition of those who try to find refuge in the self-definition of a gay or lesbian person with what they have now come to believe is a legitimate sexual orientation.

I find it inconceivable that the Father would deliberately leave us in the dark about such an important provision for human living and salvation as his approval on both homosexual intimacy and permanent intimate bonds of exclusive homosexual commitment in the manner of a married couple made up of one man and one woman. While it is true that we can correctly interpret the entire Scripture as applying, in terms of their conduct as Christians in the world and human beings and citizens in daily life, to individuals who have, I believe erroneously, labelled themselves "gay" or "lesbian" people with a "homosexual orientation"; I have found nothing in the Scripture that specifically applies to or directs these people in such a way as to approve and counsel their progress in the specifically homosexual courses of behavior, action, and relationships in which they at some point do choose to engage.

Human nature being what it is, I understand full well that any person can "fall into" a particular behavior or relationship, but at some point there usually comes a time of lucidity and a minimum of freedom of soul where a choice and decision of the whole person is made. The whole point of the declaration of CDF - and of the preaching and teaching and personal guidance of pastors and of the counselling of trained professionals - is to bring to bear on those moments of lucidity the greater light of the Scriptures reflecting the will of God so as to assist those sincerely wanting to more deeply and completely know God's will in not only finding it, but also finding the strength to walk in it.

I have yet to find a single human being for whom the following of Christ is a breeze, for whom the discovery and obedience of the Father's will is without effort, for whom the particulars of their own personal and unique human condition is not crucifying - sooner or later. I am very deeply convinced that it is not my role as a pastor to exempt anyone from carrying their cross, or to offer them a "quick fix", or to encourage them to set up a tent, in a situation that has been clearly judged by divine revelation as sinful or even an abomination in God's sight. I have no right to try to take away someone's pain - precisely because it is the Lord's plan to obtain their consent to allow Him to make their pain redemptive by uniting it to the saving passion and death of our Saviour Jesus Christ. That can only happen when they accept to carry their cross in imitation of Christ and relying on his love to raise them up out of their difficult and at times impossible situation.

There are very few outright references to homosexuality or homosexual acts in the Bible, and none of them approve the state or encourage the practice. I cannot bring myself to go against the Word of God, no matter what new arguments may issue from what we moderns call the human "sciences". Far too many positions and declarations made in the name of science are actually conjectures, which although they are often enough based on some observation of actual human practice and go to varying depths of analysis, still do not reveal the whole truth about the mystery of the human person. I cannot allow myself to go or to encourage others to go into a new form of

morality which seeks consensus by census or survey - morality by majority is no moral foundation at all - human conscience can only reliably ground itself in the natural law and divine revelation.

What does it mean to be human? What does it mean that God created us in his own likeness, "male and female He created them"? What is the purpose of human sexuality? What are the proper ends and uses of properly sexual forms of touching and intimacy? How is it proper to orient the potent power of bonding that is contained in our human capacity for tenderness in specifically sexual forms of expressing tenderness? We are not born human, but only with all the raw material for becoming human. It is by the progressive use of our capacity to make moral choices and decisions - in accord with the full truth about both God and ourselves revealed to us by God - that we give shape to the persons God intended us to become by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our formation into the fullness of Christ and so progressively become human.

Ending Homosexual Persecution: Sacrificing Society on the Altar of Individual Rights

It is only in the past few generations that western society has made moves towards legitimacy for homosexual acts, lifestyles, and unions. This is a very recent and novel development in human history; even though many societies have shown signs of homosexual activity. The Bible is true to its surroundings and gives evidence of it in Genesis. The inhuman and most certainly unchristian persecution of persons identified or revealing themselves as having homosexual inclinations has for a long time begged social reform. For that reason alone, recent changes in society are welcome. On the other hand, the current trend to place beyond questioning all things homosexual risks depriving society of its legitimate rights to ever seek a more exhaustive understanding of the full truth about this and all matters human.

In Chapter 3, "Key Aspects of Homosexuality" in the book The Truth About Homosexuality, by John F. Harvey, Jeffrey Keefe examines issues around understanding homosexuality and the excessively poor treatment people in this condition have far too often received. For about a century from the beginning of psychiatry, homosexuality was included among listings of mental disorders, until 1973; when the American Psychiatric Association excluded it in a "six to four" vote. The key factor was that "A significant proportion of homosexuals are apparently satisfied with their sexual orientation." In addition, they didn't show typical signs of illness and could generally function normally. Finally, a sentiment that keeping homosexuality listed as a mental disorder contributed to discrimination led some psychiatrists to vote for removing it. "A survey taken four years after the APA decision by the journal Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality found that 69% of responding psychiatrists agreed that 'homosexuality is usually a pathological adaptation, as opposed to a normal variation.'" Nevertheless, it seems that the factor of apparent freedom that weighed in the balance of the 1973 vote has become the cornerstone of the thinking that now underlies much of the debate.

Keefe and other authors in the book have found a "large body of accumulated literature indicating psychodynamic connections between unresolved and largely unconscious conflicts and homosexual orientation. This literature, wrought from clinical experience, sees compulsive and symptomatic homosexuality as a sexualized resolution of conflict in which the particular traumatizing experiences of an individual became interwoven with psychosexual development. Episodic homosexuality usually is not psychologically disordered because its motives generally are accessible to consciousness."

The very least we can say is that individuals come to their condition or life of homosexuality in different ways, and much of the confusion over the origin of the orientation and impulses has to do with the complexity of the developmental process of the human person, with particular attention to the process of identifying with one's gender and the difficulty of entering into comfort with the sexual complementarity of the sexes. It seems self-evident even in literature associated with some feminist and

homophile movements that the 20th century dissociation of sexuality from fertility and procreation has in effect identified homosexual relations as free of responsibility and consequences. While proponents of same-sex unions rightly point out the responsibility contained in a long-term commitment, this still does not make them equivalent to the far greater demands and responsibility of engendering and rearing children in addition to caring for and loving a spouse. Adoption of children by same-sex couples may appear to render them similar or equivalent to the universal model of the family, but such a practice takes little or no account of the full needs of children for both a mother and a father.

This complex set of issues around the common good of children and society are the primary reasons why homosexuality and lesbianism were included in official lists of human health disorders, which was a true reflection of the cultures, laws, behaviors, and attitudes of societies the world over for millennia. One way that civil societies give shape to individual consciences and assure the common good is to spontaneously develop mores and taboos, generally accepted ways of thinking and behaving, with generally accepted norms for reward and punishment. Fundamentally, it is a question of the survival of the society.

Modern society prides itself on the dismantling and abolishing of mores and taboos and all restraints on human choice and behavior, based on the false premise that freedom is the ability to make unlimited choices with no external restraints. This is particularly clear in the development of sexuality without consequences in the so-called sexual revolution of the past century. This modern trend of removing all restraints to individual rights and freedoms, though common, is regrettable in that it is a rather arrogant wholesale rejection of the wisdom and experience of entire generations of those who have lived, struggled, achieved meaning and purpose, contributed to their society, and then died. Customs are rooted in the hard-earned wisdom through experience by a preponderant number of people and societies that certain acts and behaviors are simply wrong, dangerous, and harmful – in the short, medium, and long term – both to the one who commits the act or behavior and to those who suffer its consequences, directly or indirectly.

How and why has this happened to us? We've come to think that the past 500 years of empirical research and 300 years of philosophical "enlightenment" have made us a superior civilization. Why are we, as a society in constant change, suffering so much confusion? Until this period, human beings and societies generally accepted as self-evident that there were objective differences between good and evil. The struggle of tribes and nations, peoples and individuals was not over the definition of good and evil but over power, by which one could impose on others for one's benefit even what those others experienced as evil.

Thinkers came to define the contest as one of wills, and the contestants as God and humanity. The logical outcome of this trend was the 1960's declaration that "God is dead." In other words, humanity won because it has now decided to make its own will, in every case, dominant. The purpose of the judiciary has basically been reduced from the discernment of underlying principles to the litigation of contestants caught in a conflict of wills. What has been rejected is what has always been called the natural moral law, or those fundamental inner human parameters that have been accessible to people of all times and places.

At the level of nations and governments, the solution has been to reduce the burden of governance expressed in the Greek ideal of the philosopher king through the principle of the separation of church and state. This principle can work well if governors retain a practical understanding and working knowledge of fundamental, perennial truths about the human person and civil society. What happens when the governors abandon or lose such wisdom, and the church is not allowed to remind governors and governed about the fundamental and perennial truths of their origins and their destiny, but is slandered as a tyrant to be stripped of public relevance or influence? The Church's record of service to the common good all over the world is unparalleled and is directly related to its moral Gospel principles. If all who make mistakes were to be condemned to silence, then

not only the Church would be silenced because of its all too human membership and leadership, but we would all be silenced.

Our modern world is currently composed of nation states and populations attempting to become nation states or contesting their borders and demographic compositions. These nation states were preceded by city-states going back to the dawn of recorded history, as far back as Jericho 10,000 years ago. These were generally led by monarchs, royal families, conquerors, or small groups of influential people, who generally sought guidance for their governance from their religious leaders, such as they were. In times of uncertainty, they would tend to assert their sovereign will over such counselors, and go so far as to run rough-shod over the human rights and dignity of the population in the pursuit of their objectives.

It has taken a long time for western civilization to learn the truth that the separation of church and state is desirable, but in terms whereby each has proper jurisdiction over matters that pertain to its sphere of competence, but also has the freedom to have a favorable impact on the services offered by the other for the common good. When both church and state remain open to each other and are able to maintain a harmonious mode of collaboration, they can take into account the realities that require the other's particular services to the society and be better situated to offer the other the best of their particular expertise; so that the full truth of the human person's origins, destiny and dignity can be brought to bear on the overall effort of governance.

It's our duty to promote the common good by doing all we can to favor marriage and support the family; as well as to host the pain of those who are not at ease with their gender identity in its full complementarity. Roman Catholic Christians have quite a bit of experience helping them. The public would do well to read the testimonies and expertise in [The Truth About Homosexuality](#) by John F. Harvey. There is a wide range of experience there that generally goes unreported. Jesus said that only the truth would set us free, which calls us to look at all the angles. The definition of marriage has such radical implications for society; it deserves the expert views and professional practice of theologians, Christian counselors, jurists, philosophers, bishops, and pastors. So, let's keep talking!

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Defending Homosexuality: Revisionist Deconstruction of Revelation and Christianity

Same-Sex Marriage by PAUL F. BOSCH

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A minister sent me an article by Paul F. Bosch as an expression of his own approach to the current dialogue. The author welcomes *“the Ontario Appeals Court declaring it unconstitutional to deny marriage to same-sex partners, effective immediately and without residence requirements or time restrictions”* as well as *“the subsequent decision by the Liberal government to introduce a bill to the same effect at the federal level. Yes, there's a "conscience clause" in each of these actions: Churches and religious groups will have the privilege of opting out, for their own reasons. As an expatriate American”* he is pleasantly surprised that *“apparently most Canadians have few problems with the notion of same- sex marriage.”*

He recognizes having changed opinions himself, and that *“the notion of same-sex marriages, of same-sex practices, of same-sex lifestyles, of same-sex orientations - -of same-sex anything -- together constitute the single most divisive issue in the Church today.”* He wonders *“Can we still live with each other in one Church, despite our differences; still call one another brothers and sisters? I'm willing to try.”* He adds, as a *“footnote: As usual in matters of dispute like this among Christians, the conflict is only pen-ultimately about Bible interpretation ... it is ultimately about ecclesiology: How big is your Church?...)* *On the Sunday after the Appeals Court decision, I preached on the subject in my own parish, citing what I have come to know as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, in an attempt to describe one way that Christians may come to make up their minds on this or that issue. Decision-making was my topic; the Appeals Court decision provided my example in each case. Here's a version, a digest of my argument, amended so as to highlight the liturgical and ritual issues involved.*

As I understand this Quadrilateral, Christians have four sources in any search for standards in making decisions: 1) The Bible; 2) Tradition, including but not limited to the tradition of the Church; 3) Reason, by which is meant science and the best of human rationality applied to the problem; and 4) Personal experience.

(1) The Bible gives us almost no direct guidance in the issue of same-sex marriage. It does touch on same-sex rape, in the story in Genesis of Lot's guests in their visit to the city of Sodom where the (opposite-sex) rape of Lot's own daughters is apparently permissible! And yes, same-sex relationships are proscribed in the so-called Holiness Code in the book of Leviticus. But most of that Code has been almost totally ignored by most Christians (and by many Jews) for generations, often on the Gospel-persuasive principle that Luther advocates see two paragraphs below. And the Apostle Paul speaks negatively in Romans about same-sex relations, although he seems to be addressing other issues than that of loving mutual commitments.

Jesus himself says not a word on the subject. He does have a lot to say about the love of God embracing those marginalized and despised and condemned in his society -- and about the judgement of God stretched out against those who do the marginalizing and despising and condemning.

As for Martin Luther, he was no literalist when it came to discerning what's important in the Bible and what's not. His standard? Was Christum treibt --"What drives you to Christ", in this or that passage? Lutheran Christians have a wonderful gift to offer the Church when it comes to interpreting the Bible. Against the literalists and fundamentalists of his day (and of our own), Luther argues a Gospel-principle. Not every word there is equally of value, equally authoritative for us. We're free to use the Gospel-principle: to look for Christ in scripture -- and to take everything else there with a good dose of salt.

(2) Tradition is less ambiguous on the subject of same-sex marriage, at least the tradition of the last several hundred years. It's ag'in it.

But it's worth remembering that the tradition, and indeed the Biblical witness, suggests a much wider and looser definition of marriage and family than we've assumed in recent generations. Polygamy was apparently the norm for hundreds of years throughout the Judeo-Christian story. Abraham had several wives; so did David and Solomon. Multiple wives, and even multiple concubines, so as to provide a (male) successor to carry on the (male) family name: That's part of our tradition too, let's remember.

As for more recent Christian history, theologian James Boswell has surprised us with his claim that the Church blessed same-sex relationships as early as the fourth century, and didn't get around to blessing opposite-sex unions until the eleventh.

(3) It's this third standard, reason -- human rationality-informed-by-science -- that converted my wife years ago, herself a widely-respected family educator. And she converted me.

The most recent scientific evidence suggests a kind of genetic predisposition towards homosexuality or heterosexuality. It's not something you freely choose. Perhaps three percent to ten percent of the human population is unchangeably gay. The best contemporary science maintains, that is, that we're apparently born the way we are. And we're all a little bit of both.

Further: There's almost nothing you can do to change a hetero to a homo, or a homo to a hetero. All attempts to de-program gays or re-sexualize them have met with conspicuous failure, all claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

Using the language of faith: Are we to say, then, that our creator-God made a mistake with one tenth of the human population? That one tenth of the human species is not made in the image of God like the other ninety percent? I could never say that. Could you?

(4) Personal experience. "All gays should be shot", exclaimed a member of the audience, after an address by a gay activist. "You'd shoot me?" asked the gay speaker in return. "Well, not you", was the response. To know the person, even at so superficial a level as this, to experience however briefly the speaker's personhood, was sufficient to temper a truly homophobic outburst.

Yes, personal experience with gays will make all the difference. It will change your attitudes, your perceptions, even your beliefs. It will convert you. Families whose gay children have come out of the closet will testify to that conversion, that change of heart.

To be gay, today, is a terrible burden. No one would willingly choose that orientation, that lifestyle, in today's America or Canada. Perhaps one day we will be able to lift some of that burden. Until then, I'm pleased and proud that my adopted country has joined Belgium and the Netherlands as one of the first three countries in the world to legalize gay marriage.

And until then --Here's the connection with liturgy and ritual-- I'm willing to argue that the Churches should get out altogether of the business of marrying. Anyone. All people. Even heteros. Leave it to government to marry people. Then let the Churches do what they do best, what they are called to do: that is, bless. And let the churches bless promiscuously --that is, give thanks to God-- for whatever is good and God-pleasing. Not Trident nuclear submarines, surely, not cruise missiles, but certainly loving mutual human commitments. Wherever we find them."

The author then gives references to websites and developments regarding churches engaging in same-sex blessings and covenants and producing rituals and ritual books for practicing these. He also looks forward to developments in the area of legislation by the Government of Canada in six months.