

Orthodox Reality Check: The Issue of “Gay/Same-Sex Marriage” (or whatever the world wants to call the legalization of homosexual unions)

From both perspectives of world history and Christian theology, the phrase “gay marriage” is an *oxymoron*, a contradiction in terms. The acceptance of such a social convention would be the adoption of a different reality, a new reality in the annals of world history, a *non-reality* according to Orthodox Tradition.

Throughout the history of the world, as reiterated recently in the 1996 United States’ *Defense of Marriage Act* (DOMA), marriage has always been defined as the exclusive union of a man and a woman. This union is recognized both for legal and religious purposes: regarding sexual relations, the bearing and rearing of children, and property and inheritance rights.

Christian teaching makes clear what the peoples of the world acknowledge by historical consensus as *natural*, namely, that by God’s creation and design marriage only pertains to the relationship between a man and a woman. “Have you not read that He Who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ (Gen. 1:27; 2:24)? So then, what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6). “For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another; men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in

themselves the penalty of their error which was due” (Rom. 1:26-27).

It is no surprise that homosexuality, like any other unnatural activity, results in unhealthy effects – significantly reduced life expectancy, higher incidence of serious and life-threatening diseases, and elevated promiscuity even among “committed” relationships, just to name a few. By definition (despite the promise of reproductive technologies), homosexual unions are sterile, childless, and therefore societally unsustainable.¹

All this means that acceptance of “same-sex marriage” as normal is the toleration of an *insanity*, the acceptance of an *unreality*. As such, adoption of “gay marriage” demonstrates the sway of delusional thinking on a national scale. A person (and society) must be culturally and religiously ignorant, illiterate, and/or apathetic to adopt any convention that undermines the very foundation of their own existence, especially when that convention – “gay marriage” – has no precedent, but only approbation, in shared human experience and belief. One can rightly say, not as an extremist but speaking the awful truth, that the insistence of pushing the “gay marriage” agenda is

¹ See St. John Chrysostom’s comments in Homily 4 on *Romans*: “For genuine pleasure is that which is according to nature. But when God has left one, then all things are turned upside down. And thus not only was their doctrine satanical, but their life too was diabolical.” (Post-Nicene Fathers collection, Vol. XI, 355-359)

rebellion against God and cultural suicide.

This calls for an Orthodox reality check. The issue of "gay marriage" shows how *ahistorical and secularized* Western and American society has become paradoxically at its so-called "Christian" roots. Just this past month a Methodist (traditionally Christian) congregation in North Carolina announced it would no longer perform any heterosexual marriages until gay couples could receive equal treatment from their community. So now, in the name of God and Jesus Christ, some Americans propose we *must* acknowledge "gay marriage" in order to be American and Christian.

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20). "Although [human beings] knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened...Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie..." (Rom. 1:21, 24-25).

For the Orthodox, the issue of "same-sex marriage" is an issue, yes, of morality, of ethics, of Scriptural interpretation, of traditional values - all these things. However, the issue of "gay marriage" is summarily about the very *truth of our existence*. It is about the ultimate truth of life from God and lived to the glory of God, a life of salvation. Thus the Orthodox must affirm, confess, and practice the only reality present to

us by God's creation and restoration in the Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

First, God-given marriage is an *icon* (image, or picture) of the relationship God has with His people (Hos. 2:19-20; Eph. 5:21-33). The purpose of marriage is salvation, communion with God in Christ, not merely the gratification of erotic desire, the utilitarian procreation of children, or the convenient sharing of possessions. Sexual relations are a good gift from God expressing the committed love and intimacy of pure devotion to the other person. The conception and birth of children realize the creative grace of God and interdependence of each succeeding generation. Within marriage, the life of the Holy Trinity transforms human interaction between two different yet equal persons into a perfect union of divine complementarity (Gen. 2:18, 21-23; 1 Cor. 7:3-4; 11:8-12).

Any attempt to (re)define marriage as something other than the above is simply *improper*, which applies equally to heterosexual or homosexual arrangements. For instance, a man and woman simply living together, or cohabitating, does not constitute marriage, even if they share a sexually exclusive relationship, produce children, have a joint bank account, and announce to others they are a couple - because their relationship is not permanently recognized and manifested with the blessing of God (or civil law, for that matter). The homosexual couple cannot be married because both partners are the same gender.

Second, all life at its core, whether personal or in society, is *theological*; it only reveals its true sense

when understood in relation to God. The pursuit, or use, of another sense for life ends in the substitution of something other than God in the place of God (i.e., idolatry).

Why has “gay marriage” become such a prominent issue permeating, or defining, public discourse in America today? Politically, “gay marriage” builds constituency, political supporters, which secures position, money, and power. Personally, “gay marriage” exercises individual self-determination to do what one wants no matter what that is. It is the ultimate banner of individual freedom from any “traditional” norm including “God” Himself, which is why the debate over “gay marriage” is being conducted almost exclusively in *abstract legal* terms of Constitutionally guaranteed “rights,” carefully divorced from the modernly disdained, inconvenient evidence of history and religion.

An Orthodox reality check notes our God-given ability of self-determination – created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen. 1:26) – yet it refuses to make an idol of the self. We are not God, God is. We have the responsibility to live in cooperation with God, but not as His equals, certainly not as His masters. And we are personally responsible for the other person, our neighbor, to elevate each other’s lives in accordance with God’s loving design.

Far more than a mere semantic debate, the issue of “gay marriage” reveals an all-out assault on the notion of objective truth. If we can (re)define *marriage* however we want, then we can define anything according to our own design, and more importantly, we can

sever any and all ties from that which gives objective truth its reality in the first place. From an Orthodox perspective, the issue of “same-sex marriage” is ultimately an attack on the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, Who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6), “through [Whom] and for [Whom] all things were created...and in [Whom] all things consist” (that is, hold together; Col. 1:16, 17).

Thus the Orthodox are beholden to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) concerning this issue and “give a defense...for the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear, having a good conscience” (1 Pet. 3:15, 16). We must espouse things divine, not only for this age, but for the age to come of which we have already begun to participate through communion in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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