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HOMOSEXUALITY, MISOGYNY, AND GOD'S PLAN

John D. Kronen and Eric H. Reitan

In response to powerful criticisms of older arguments, contemporary defenders of the Church's traditional stance on homosexuality have fashioned a new kind of argument based upon the special relationship God created between the sexes. In this paper we examine two recent incarnations of this kind of argument and show that both fail to demonstrate the inherent immorality of homosexual relationships, and at most demonstrate that homosexual relationships are inferior to heterosexual relationships in certain respects. At the end of the paper we argue that a good God would have reason to make a certain proportion of humanity homosexual in order to unmask sexist myths. In this way homosexuality could itself strengthen, rather than weaken, the special relationship God created between the sexes.

It is no secret that the Christian church's traditional stance (hereafter CTS) towards same-gender sexual relationships has been one of condemnation. It is important to point out that this condemnation extends not merely to promiscuous or casual homosexual sex, but to monogamous, committed partnerships analogous to what we find in traditional heterosexual marriages. While heterosexual marriages are sanctified and honored, partnerships which differ from such marriages only in this single respect—that they involve members of the same sex—have been condemned. It is this condemnation which we wish to explicitly explore in this paper.

Typically, CTS has been defended on two grounds. The Catholic Church has relied on natural law arguments which appeal to the reproductive end of sex, and which condemn any form of sexual activity which thwarts that reproductive end (including contraception and masturbation).¹ Other Christians, who do not wish to rule out contraception, have appealed to specific scriptural passages which appear to condemn homosexuality.²

It is not our intention here to examine either of these defenses of CTS in detail. Rather, our aim is to examine a new defense of CTS that has emerged in light of strong criticisms of the more traditional defenses. For the sake of completeness, however, it may be worth briefly *outlining* why these older methods of defending CTS have come under fire.

The natural law argument, in addition to having troubling consequences (it seems to rule out heterosexual marriages in which at least one partner is known to be infertile, and it led so noted a thinker as St. Thomas



Aquinas to conclude that all “un-natural” acts, including homosexual acts and acts of bestiality, are more serious sins than rape³), also fails to adequately consider that there is more than one legitimate end of human sexuality (for example, the expression of love and the strengthening of intimacy). There is no good reason to suppose that a person cannot legitimately pursue one or two of these ends without pursuing them all.⁴ This seems to be the insight underlying the Protestant acceptance of contraception

The appeal to specific scriptural passages has come under fire for several reasons—first, because of the paucity and ambiguity of the passages themselves. There are very few passages in Scripture that make mention of homosexuality—fewer than ten, and none of them are in the Gospels. In these passages there is no indication that the scriptural authors knew of the existence of a homosexual orientation. Rather, their assumption seems to have been that homosexual activity occurs due to an excess of lust. It is, therefore, unclear whether or not the condemnation embodied in these passages should be extended to committed monogamy between homosexual partners. Furthermore, the clearest condemnations of homosexual activity are found in *Leviticus*, alongside rules that are not considered authoritative by contemporary Christians. Finally, the very activity of “proof-texting” (of defending normative views on the basis of isolated scriptural passages taken out of context) has come to be seen as problematic, given the perceived need to interpret scriptural passages in the light of some appropriate hermeneutic device.⁵

Because of the apparent failure of these traditional methods of supporting the Christian condemnation of homosexuality, recent thinkers have pursued what might be called more “holistic” arguments. These arguments do not abandon scriptural or natural law thinking. Rather they maintain that, if we look at Scripture or at the natural order more broadly than has been done before, we will see that in creating human beings with two genders God was making possible a special kind of good that homosexuality thwarts. Homosexuality is wrong, then, on these grounds.

Our intention in what follows is to show that a key premise of this sort of holistic argument—namely, the premise that homosexuality goes against the special order God created between males and females—is untenable. We will do this by arguing that under the most plausible understanding of the nature of that special order, homosexuality actually complements and supports that order and, therefore, *a fortiori*, does not thwart it. More specifically, our argument is that the existence of homosexuality undermines the myths which perpetuate misogyny, thereby combating one of the chief obstacles to healthy heterosexual relationships. It is not our intention here to make any specific claims about the intrinsic value of homosexual relationships, or what role they might serve in the created order independently of their supportive role with respect to heterosexuality, since these concerns do not bear directly on the primary task of refuting the holistic argument.

I: The Holistic Argument Against Homosexuality

One recent advocate of this sort of holistic argument is Craig Koester.⁶ Koester wants to avoid the charges of arbitrariness and inconsistency that

have been leveled against those who have argued for CTS by simply quoting certain passages of the Old Law. Koester notes that the "interpretation of these texts is complex because Christians generally recognize that the laws in the Pentateuch cannot be translated directly into contemporary Christian standards. Laws governing sexual behavior appear alongside regulations which Christians do not observe, such as those concerning kosher slaughter, the offering of sacrifices...etc.'" To avoid problems with this method, Koester seeks to defend CTS by locating the condemnation of homosexual acts in the broader context of what the Bible has to say about the nature and purpose of human sexuality.

Briefly, Koester's view is that if we look at what the Bible as a whole has to say on this subject, we will see that God created a special order between males and females which finds its fruition in heterosexual marriages. This special order is affirmed, Koester thinks, by the text in *Genesis* (I, 27) which says that God created human beings male and female—a text which Koester thinks shows that the different sexes were created for a special sort of bond. Koester goes on to argue that, in condemning divorce, Jesus implicitly supports the notion that a special order exists between the sexes. Finally, Koester tries to demonstrate how Paul pulls together the teachings of both the Old Testament and Jesus, reaffirming that the only proper place for a sexual relationship is in the context of marriage between persons of a different sex.⁸

This argument is based on a holistic reading of the Bible and is, therefore, still a scriptural argument even though it is not rooted explicitly in the half-dozen passages that mention homosexual activity. But this argument also has the flavor of a natural law argument, albeit not of the narrow sort favored by the tradition. Instead, it appeals to the natural order and design of the world, especially the ordering of higher species according to two sexes.

Thus, a holistic scriptural argument against homosexuality dovetails with a holistic natural law argument; both defend CTS on the basis of the natural division of species into two sexes, with procreation possible only in cross-gender couplings. Arguments of this sort assume that there are special benefits to this ordering. God created human beings in two sexes in order to allow for the attainment of these special benefits. The argument concludes that, since heterosexuality appears to be an essential part of God's plan, human beings who engage in homosexual sex are going against God's plan and are, therefore, behaving immorally.

Put formally, the argument (henceforth HA) is as follows:

- 1) If God created a special order between males and females then any sexual relationship which goes against that order is wrong.
- 2) God created a special order between males and females.

- 3) Any sexual relationship which goes against that order is wrong.
- 4) Homosexual relationships go against the special order God created between males and females.

- 5) Homosexual relationships are wrong.

For the sake of this paper, we will accept the first two premises as following both from a holistic reading of Scripture and from a holistic assessment of the natural order. It is premise (4)—that homosexual relations go against God's plan—which we will challenge.

Even if a special order exists between men and women which finds fruition in heterosexual relationships, it does not follow from that that every human being is obligated to pursue heterosexual relationships. Celibacy has been traditionally regarded as an acceptable life choice precisely for this reason. While a life of celibacy rules out the realization of whatever special goods heterosexual partnerships make possible, celibacy is not, therefore, wrong, precisely because it does nothing to violate or go against such partnerships. Although the celibate might lose out on something God made possible, the celibate is not to be condemned. In fact, it has long been held (especially in the Catholic Church) that even though the celibate may lose out on the special good or goods of heterosexual marriage, in doing so the celibate gains access to a different set of goods. Likewise, in order for homosexual relationships to be wrong, it is not enough that homosexual relationships be different from heterosexual ones. Homosexual relationships must in some way positively *thwart* or *violate* the special order between males and females. If homosexual relationships do not violate this special order, then the most we can say is that homosexuals are losing out on one special good that God made possible—although, again, they might (as celibates purportedly do) realize other special goods as a result. This latter possibility is not one we will explore in this paper.

In order to determine whether or not homosexual relationships go against the special order God created between males and females, we must explore the nature of that order. More specifically, we need to know what special goods are made possible by arranging the world such that there are two human genders, and such that procreation is possible only in cross-gender couplings. What could God's purposes have been in arranging the world in such a way?

II: Heterosexuality and Character-Building Challenges

The most obvious good associated with heterosexual sex is that it has the possibility of issue. There are a number of problems, however, with identifying the special good of heterosexuality with reproduction. Some of these have already been mentioned. What has typically not been noticed is that the possibility of procuring offspring cannot be the *reason* God created the human species with *two* sexes, since He could just as easily have created a human species in which same-sex couplings could result in offspring. That offspring can occur only in heterosexual unions is not a necessary truth, but a consequence of God's design. The question, then, is why God designed the world such that there are two sexes and such that progeny are possible only when couplings occur between heterosexual partners. What good might God have been making possible by structuring the world in such a way?

Paul Cameron, in "A Case Against Homosexuality," gives an interesting answer to this question.⁹ Cameron argues that there are special

goods associated with heterosexual relationships which cannot be achieved (or are much harder to achieve) in homosexual relationships. These special goods emerge directly from gender difference. Without such a difference, Cameron thinks that sexual relationships will most likely lose these special goods. If we accept Cameron's thesis on this matter, then we have a clear reason why God would have ordered the world with such a gender division in place.

According to Cameron, the gender difference between sexual partners in a heterosexual coupling creates difficulties in producing sexual gratification, difficulties which can only be overcome through sensitivity, communication, and commitment. Thus, the pursuit of sexual gratification by a heterosexual couple drives the couple towards the development of positive personal characteristics, or virtues. The gender difference by itself creates a kind of sexual incompatibility that must be overcome; the process of overcoming that incompatibility encourages personal growth.¹⁰

With respect to this good, the existence of a significant difference between the sexual partners is necessary in a way that it is not for procreation. According to Cameron, because homosexual intercourse occurs between two people whose bodies respond in roughly the same way, who know from their own responses how to pleasure their partner, and who do not need to accommodate themselves to remarkably different arousal patterns and tempos, there is little need for communication between homosexual partners, and a high probability of gratification. The *hard work* heterosexuals must undertake is simply not necessary in homosexual sex. Thus, in homosexual intercourse there is no need for a deep, personal investment of one's energies, and the bonding that comes from such an investment of energies may be lost. There is, then, a lower probability of long-term pairing between homosexual couples. It is easier for homosexuals to be casual about their sexuality, to practice it promiscuously, etc..¹¹

Even when there is long-term pairing, Cameron thinks that certain goods associated with heterosexual monogamy are lost in homosexual monogamy. Again, these goods stem from the gender difference itself. Cameron says that "in heterosexuality, no matter how similar the participants, there is always a considerable gap between them. To stay together takes great effort, and the expenditure of this effort prompts both personal and social commitment to the partner...."¹²

Because the heterosexual partners are so dissimilar, accommodation and adjustment are their key strategies. Because mutually satisfying heterosexual sexing takes so much effort, both participants have to "hang in there" long after "sane people" would have toddled off in frustration."¹³

Cameron thinks that this feature of heterosexual partnerships has social benefits as well, leading to a more enduring and stable social structure overall:

We become the way we act. The heterosexual relationship places a premium on "getting on" and thus provides a model to smooth countless other human interactions.¹⁴

III: Critique of Cameron

There are a number of problems with Cameron's account here. The most obvious is that it seems to make too much of the role that the gender difference plays in the creation of character-building conflicts and challenges. While the sexual difference can be a source of incompatibility, both sexual and otherwise, it is far from the only one. Individual human beings are different enough that any couple, no matter what their respective genders, will need to work at overcoming conflicts through sensitivity and communication if their partnership is to succeed and be mutually rewarding. Thus, gender difference is not strictly *necessary* for the existence of character-building conflicts and challenges.

Furthermore, one can doubtless find examples of heterosexual partners who, despite their physiological differences, are quite compatible sexually. Typically, such compatibility is thought of as a benefit and is often one of the criteria according to which long-term heterosexual pairings are made. We find it difficult to believe that these relationships are inferior simply because the couple doesn't need to work at achieving good sex. One might even argue that freedom from the frustrations of sexual incompatibility will endow the couple with more energy to focus on other ways to enhance bonding. Be that as it may, we can see that gender difference alone is not sufficient for the existence of character-building conflicts.

Another (and, we think, more important) problem with Cameron's analysis lies in the fact that the differences in sexual arousal patterns between men and women is such that mutual communication and sensitivity is not always, or even typically, what is needed for sexual gratification. Men, especially young men, can often achieve physical gratification during sex without sensitive communication with their partners. Anorgasmia is a significant problem with women, not with men. This is due to a number of factors, including the typically slower arousal rate of women, the greater chance that women will experience pain during intercourse, and the location of the organs of sexual stimulation. What this means is that, if a woman is to experience physically gratifying sex, it is usually necessary for her to communicate her sexual needs to her partner. It is also necessary for her partner to listen to her with sensitivity and to be responsive to her needs. But the reverse is not as often the case.

While it is true that men suffer from sexual dysfunctions that can be overcome only with the help of a sensitive partner (impotence and premature ejaculation, for example), our point is that it is more often the woman, rather than the man, who suffers most seriously when sensitive communication is lacking in a sexual relationship.

What this means is that men who are prepared to be indifferent to the sexual needs of their female partners can typically achieve physical satisfaction in sex without sensitive, mutual communication. In fact, many heterosexual relationships, both long and short term, display just this sort of disparity: the man finds gratification without communication while the woman endures an unsatisfying sexual union. In short, it is not the case, at least not with many men, that men *must* invest effort in sensitive communication in order to find physical gratification in sex. Nor is it the case that

women will achieve sexual gratification if they make such an investment (since what they need is for their partner to do so).

There are a number of possible consequences of this unequal dynamic. One of the most pernicious is that there is a self-interested motive for men to willfully dismiss the sexual needs of their female partners, a practice that has the possibility of leading to a more far-reaching dismissal of women: if a woman's needs don't matter, then the man does not need to consider them, and can achieve sexual gratification without expending the effort needed to communicate with the woman in a sensitive way. Of course, men who routinely dismiss the needs of women may find it difficult to find female sexual partners, unless the social structure is arranged so that women are in an inferior position with respect to men, lacking in the power to provide for themselves and depending on the good will of men.

While we do not mean to say that the differences in sexual arousal patterns between men and women are solely responsible for the historic oppression of women, we do think that it is important to note that the extant sexual differences between men and women have the potential to exacerbate the injustices that flow from self-centeredness. In same-sex couplings this danger is minimized. Thus, even if Cameron is right about the possible good results associated with heterosexuality, those goods need to be counterbalanced against the possible evil results.

We will return to these issues later. For now, we will acknowledge that, despite the problems with Cameron's account, he does make one insight worth keeping: the physiological differences between men and women provide a near guarantee that heterosexual partners will be confronted with significant conflicts and challenges in their relationship, the overcoming of which can help people grow into more virtuous human beings. While we must add that such conflicts and challenges will usually be found in same-sex unions as well, we agree that these conflicts and challenges are less likely to be found in the sexual domain, thus making homosexual intercourse easier to practice in a promiscuous or casual way. But in so agreeing, we must point out that this fact does not rule out the legitimacy of committed, monogamous homosexual unions. Rather, this fact means that exhortations to committed monogamy must be delivered to homosexuals with greater urgency, must be inculcated sooner, etc., than is the case with heterosexuals.

We also acknowledge that the centrality of sex in human life and human relationships means that the absence of conflicts and challenges in the sexual arena can be a liability for the homosexual relationship. For if Cameron is right, homosexual relationships lack character-building challenges in one of the most important spheres of human life, the sexual sphere. In this respect, heterosexual unions have associated with them a unique good which homosexual unions lack.

Together, other considerations aside, these facts could serve as a reason why a good God would create the human race with two sexes. The fact that progeny can proceed only from heterosexual couplings would provide a motive in human societies for the promotion of heterosexual unions, thereby promoting the kind of union that has the greatest capacity to inculcate virtue.

IV: Homosexuality as a Threat to Heterosexuality

None of this, however, shows that homosexuality is wrong. At most it shows that heterosexual partnerships are *better* than homosexual ones. More likely, it shows that a predominantly heterosexual social order is better for society as a whole than a predominantly homosexual one—a point that may be consistent with saying that individual homosexual relationships are as good, in themselves, as heterosexual ones.

But homosexual partnerships could still be good, even if a predominantly heterosexual order is better than the alternatives. And even if heterosexual partnerships have the potential for being better, surely that potential exists only for persons who have some kind of attraction to the opposite sex. For persons of a primarily homosexual disposition, heterosexual partnerships have little possibility of being better than homosexual partnerships, and a real likelihood of ending in bitterness and alienation.¹⁵

Let us put this point more formally. With some modification, Cameron's thinking can serve as the basis for an argument in support of the fourth premise of the holistic argument (HA) for CTS. The argument (henceforth CA) can be outlined as follows.

- C1) The special order that God created between males and females is constituted by obstacles arising from sexual differences that can only be overcome through sensitivity, communication, and commitment.
 - C2) Homosexual relationships are romantic relationships which are not constituted by obstacles arising from such sexual differences.
 - C3) Any romantic relationship which is not constituted by such obstacles goes against an order that is so constituted.
-
- C4) Homosexual relationships go against the special order God created between males and females.

The conclusion of this argument, (C4), is simply premise 4 of HA. The problem with CA lies with premise (C3). So far, only (C1) and (C2) have been defended. Unless Cameron can give us some good reason to believe that (C3) is true, CA fails to support premise 4 of HA. While Cameron does try to defend (C3), we do not think that his defense is sound.

To see this, let us examine why Cameron thinks that (C3) is true. The core of his thinking here is that a romantic relationship not constituted by the sort of character-building challenges observed in heterosexual relationships will involve sex that is more intrinsically pleasurable than heterosexual sex, and will therefore attract persons away from heterosexuality. Cameron believes that, once society allows homosexual relationships, many persons who otherwise would have formed heterosexual relationships will be lured away by the greater fleshly pleasures of homosexual relationships, thereby undermining the heterosexual social order. Put another way, Cameron thinks that the difficulty inherent in achieving satisfying heterosexual sex makes heterosexual unions vulnerable to competi-

tion from more instantly gratifying types of sex. Romantic relationships, such as homosexual ones, which lack the inherent difficulties of heterosexual ones, will out-compete heterosexual ones and undermine the special order God created between males and females—unless, of course, homosexual relationships are strictly disallowed.

If this line of reasoning is sound, then CA is a strong argument, and our objection to premise 4 of HA has been answered. But this line of reasoning is fatally flawed. Most importantly, this line of reasoning assumes that homosexual relationships are *intrinsically* more attractive than heterosexual ones regardless of a person's sexual orientation. But research into sexual orientation says otherwise. Even if Cameron is right that homosexual sex is more pleasurable than heterosexual sex, empirical evidence suggests that the direction of a person's sexual attraction is not determined by considerations about which kind of relationship will bring greater hedonistic satisfaction. The number of persons of homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual orientation seems to be relatively constant across cultures, despite variations in cultural norms and social sanctions.¹⁶ This is true even in the case of cultures which impose severe penalties for engaging in homosexual acts.¹⁷ If Cameron is right that the potential for pleasure determines who you are attracted to, why are the number of persons attracted to members of the same sex substantially the same both in cultures where there is a permissive attitude towards homosexuality and in cultures where pursuing homosexual relationships is likely to lead to significant suffering? Furthermore, the best available evidence suggests that children raised by lesbian parents (who are presumably not raised to have the same kind of aversion to homosexuality as others) are no more or less likely to turn out to have a homosexual orientation than children raised by heterosexual parents.¹⁸

Thus, empirical evidence belies Cameron's thinking. Sexual orientation does not appear to be determined by hedonistic assessments of what kind of sex will lead to greater pleasure; on the contrary, one's sexual orientation determines with whom one is likely to find sex a pleasure. Heterosexuals, by virtue of their heterosexuality, find intercourse with members of the opposite sex more attractive than sex with members of the same sex.

If this is true, then the majority of persons even in cultures tolerant of homosexuality will remain heterosexual. So it seems that large numbers of heterosexuals will not abandon heterosexual relationships for homosexual ones if taboos against homosexuality are lifted.

In addition to empirical evidence, we can appeal to phenomenological evidence. We believe that most persons, upon introspection, would agree that their sexual orientation is something of a given: they simply are attracted to members of one sex, and not to members of the other, for reasons having nothing to do with assessments of which kind of sex is intrinsically more pleasurable.

We may add to this a theological argument. If God created different sexes because of the intrinsic goods this makes possible, it does not seem that any social norms could cause a majority of persons to abandon heterosexual relationships for homosexual ones. This is because God would make most persons heterosexual in their orientation in light of the greater goods

heterosexual relationships make possible. In fact, this theological argument goes a long way to explain the empirical and phenomenological evidence to the effect that sexual orientation is relatively fixed and resistant to social pressures or other forces.

Furthermore, one can argue that the present intolerance towards homosexual relationships actually harms heterosexual relationships because in an atmosphere of intolerance many homosexuals feel compelled to enter into ill advised heterosexual marriages. Such marriages are not able to overcome most homosexuals' basic sexual drive and the result of this is often, predictably, tragic. The homosexual spouse seeks sexual liaisons outside the marriage, very often in frequent anonymous encounters. This is very harmful to the institution of marriage and would probably be very largely eliminated if persons of a homosexual orientation felt free to act on their orientation without running into the disapproval of society.

Finally, we can offer up a moral argument against Cameron's defense of C3. In particular, Cameron's defense of C3 succeeds only if one makes the following assumption: any practice which, if allowed, would have a tendency to reduce the number of heterosexual marriages, should be discriminated against in order to promote the heterosexual order. But there are other practices besides homosexuality which might have this effect—indeed, which (if our preceding arguments are accurate) would be more likely to have this effect. Thus, if we accept Cameron's assumption, we are forced to conclude that the practice of remaining single all one's life should be discriminated against, since the independence offered by such a life would be appealing to many people and would draw them away from heterosexual marriage. Even more troubling, it seems that the practice of women working and having careers outside of the home should be discriminated against. This is so because, if such a practice is allowed, more women will be financially independent and will have less need to enter into marriage in order to find financial security. Thus, by allowing this practice, we undercut a strong motive for entering into heterosexual marriage. By Cameron's reasoning, we should permit only one of the sexes to have careers, since the ensuing dependence of one sex on the other would promote heterosexual marriage. But supporting the heterosexual social order does not seem to be such an important moral goal that it justifies these sorts of infringements on individual liberty. Since these consequences of Cameron's assumption are repugnant, it does not seem that Cameron can rightly use the assumption to support C3.

In summary, then, it does not appear that Cameron has given a very convincing case for (C3). His argument fails, therefore, to show that homosexuality goes against the special order God created between males and females.

V: The Place of Homosexuality in God's Plan

So far, we have shown that defenders of CTS have failed to support their view on holistic grounds because they have failed to show that homosexuality goes against the natural order God created between men and women. Not only do we think that this cannot be done but, on the contrary, we believe that a further examination will show that homosexuality

can actually further the special good of heterosexuality. Thus, *a fortiori*, homosexuality does not go against the natural order.

Let us approach this point from a somewhat different angle. If we are to trust modern research, sexual orientation has a significant biological basis. One's homosexuality is discovered, rather than chosen.¹⁹ If the traditional Christian stance towards homosexuality is correct, this modern research leaves us with something of a puzzle: if homosexuality goes against the natural order, why would a good God create the natural order in such a way that some people are born with a homosexual disposition and, therefore, are not only cut off from the special good of heterosexuality but also disposed to act against the natural order? At least at first glance, it seems that a good God would not do such a thing.

Someone might point out, of course, that this problem is not too different from other problems that together constitute the problem of evil. Restricting ourselves to the sex drive, we might ask why some people are psychopathic sex predators. Even should it turn out that their predisposition to sexual violence has some biological basis, we needn't conclude that sexual violence is part of God's plan. On the contrary, it seems that some conditions, even if they are caused by biochemistry, nevertheless go against the natural order.²⁰ The difficulty for theologians and philosophers lies in explaining why God would permit such evils to exist. Perhaps a homosexual orientation is an evil of this sort.

What we are arguing here is that homosexuality is not an evil of this sort—that it is not evil at all—and that, therefore, in this case, we do not have to confront the formidable task of reconciling a seemingly natural evil with the existence of a good God. Unlike the psychopathic sex predator, the homosexual is not engaged in *prima facie* evil. There are no obvious victims, and the harms associated with homosexuality (of the sort noted by Cameron) are more closely linked to homophobia than to the orientation itself. If a tendency to sexual violence were biologically innate, then the obvious evil of sexual violence would force us to explain why God would permit some people to be biologically disposed to practice it. We are not similarly forced into the task of theodicy when we confront homosexuality.

And this is, in a way, quite fortunate—because if homosexuality (understood as an orientation) *did* go against the natural order, we would face unique challenges in trying to reconcile it with God's goodness. Consider that according to the Christian tradition the root of all sin is a lack of the true love of God that leads to a disorder among the lower tendencies of the soul.²¹ But none of these tendencies are *per se* and naturally ordered to what is intrinsically evil,²² a fact which follows from the traditional view that human nature, taken as in its very created essence, remains good even after the fall.²³ If we accept the prevailing evidence pointing to the innateness of homosexuality, and if we also accept that all expressions of homosexual love are sinful, what follows is that homosexuals could not properly order even their lower desires; for in addition to the disorder *among* the desires that a lack of proper love for God creates, homosexuals would have innate romantic desires for members of the same sex that are *intrinsically* and *per se* disordered. It is *this* that seems contrary to God's goodness and to the inherent goodness of human nature even after the fall. The best scientific

evidence suggests that the sex drive of the homosexual is innately directed towards members of the same sex. No change merely in the ordering of desires—no increase or reduction in the intensity of desires—would change the *direction* of homosexual inclination. And this fact makes it uniquely difficult to maintain, given God's goodness, that homosexuality is evil.

We are not faced with the same sort of difficulty when we try to explain the sexual predator. With the sexual predator, the object of desire is not what is unusual, but rather the *way in which* that object is pursued. There is a kind of Aristotelian excess in the expression of the sex drive. Sexual predation can therefore be explained in terms of a disorder *among* desires, even if that disorder turns out to be biologically caused. For example, it may be that, not only is the sex drive itself excessive, but that the desire for control is so excessive that parity in relationships is feared, so that the sex drive can only express itself in a context of superiority and domination. Interestingly, the same disorder might account for pedophilia.

Many Christians solve the sort of problem for CTS we are raising here by simply rejecting contemporary research into the etiology of the homosexual orientation, insisting in the face of the evidence that homosexuality is a chosen condition and that there is no innate homosexual disposition. This alternative has the disadvantage of making Christians appear to be unreasonable and dogmatic. It also fails to provide the needed account of why homosexual relationships violate the natural order and, therefore, begs the question at hand.

Our alternative is to say that homosexuality has a place in God's plan, that it somehow fits into the natural order and perfects it—in short, that rather than violating the special order between males and females, homosexuality complements that special order.

As noted above, the special goods associated with heterosexual unions are only *possible* goods: character-building challenges build character only when there is an effort to overcome the challenges, and only when that effort is *directed* in the right way. We saw that it is possible in heterosexual relationships for one partner (usually the male) to avoid the character-building challenges of heterosexual sex by perpetrating an injustice against the other partner. Perpetrating such injustices is rendered easier when myths or ideologies are developed which mask the injustice or provide a context for its legitimization.

As a matter of fact, women have been historically oppressed, both by their male sexual partners and by social structures and institutions. This oppression has been perpetuated and vindicated by myths about the nature of human sexuality, myths which make sexual intercourse out to be an act that is essentially hierarchical. Our claim is that the acceptance of existing homosexual partnerships in a largely heterosexual population would help to undermine these myths, thereby exposing the real injustices which have emerged historically in heterosexual partnerships and hence serving and supporting the special goods associated with heterosexuality.

It is a sad fact of history that the relationship between the two genders has been one of hierarchy and oppression. Women have been historically denied the kinds of opportunities and powers in society that would enable them to be self-sufficient. Until this century women could not vote in most

supposedly democratic countries. In heterosexual partnerships they have been subservient to their husbands, often to the point of being considered property. Their capacity for autonomy has been restricted, their roles have been to serve men, they have been exploited and oppressed in countless ways. And for much of human history the victimization of women has been justified and institutionalized with the help of myths and ideologies which make women out to be inferior to men, created to serve the needs of men.²⁴ While it is true that numerous advances have been made in recent history to liberate women both politically and personally, this liberating effort is still far from complete.

This is not to say that all men have historically abused their wives. Rather, it is to say that the social structure has made it possible for men to abuse their wives with relative impunity—especially when the abuse takes the form of a neglect or dismissal of the needs and interests of the wife. Women have therefore needed to rely on the good will of their husbands in order to lead fulfilling lives. While many men have throughout history exhibited such good will, the fact that women have *needed* to rely on that good will has itself been a sign of their subjugation.

In short, the very biological difference between men and women which, if we are to believe Cameron, can help facilitate the development of virtue, can be and has been used as a excuse to perpetuate vice. Because men and women *are* different, it becomes possible to develop myths which say that one gender, as a class, is of a higher order than the other. And this is precisely what has been done. The monogamous sexual union has been conceived as a hierarchical contract between an inferior and a superior, in which the inferior gives up her individuality in return for the leadership and protection that the superior can provide. This mythic way of conceiving the nature of the heterosexual union finds its ultimate expression in the seal of the contract, the sex act itself—so much so that sex in any other position but the male-superior “missionary” position has been widely viewed as a perversion. In sex, the woman’s body is physically taken; her flesh becomes the man’s flesh. He “claims” her.

Within the context of this mythology, the existence of two sexes is essential because the sex act is an act of dominance and submission, and therefore requires the subordination of an inferior to a superior. Without two sexes, one inferior to the other, the sex act in its mythic form is undermined.

Homosexuality flies in the face of this mythical symbology. In homosexuality, there is no biological difference between the partners which can serve to justify a hierarchical sexual union. When confronting a gay relationship, at least between men of comparable maturity and social status, one must understand the sexual union in one of two ways: either one man “takes on the woman’s role,” in which case it is possible for men to be submissive in sex, to be “taken”; or both are equal partners, in which case there is no need for a dominant-submissive sexual relationship. Confronting lesbian relationships, one must either accept that one woman adopts the “man’s role,” or that there is an equal exchange. No matter which interpretation one accepts, the myth that male dominance and female submission are an essential part of human sexuality explodes.

Christine Gudorf, in *Victimization: Examining Christian Complicity*,

expresses this point concisely in the following passage:

To the extent that sexuality has been understood as basically heterosexual, it has been understood as involving a male and a female role. With sexual activity itself, those roles have been understood in sexist ways: the male role has been understood as superior, active, and controlling, and the female role as inferior, passive, and controlled...From this perspective, male homosexuality is regarded as degrading to men, because it puts some men in the inferior female role, thus undermining the male claim to superiority and control.²⁵

If homosexual sex is legitimate, if it is not regarded as unnatural in a morally significant way, then the sexual myth that vindicates male oppression of women must be abandoned. The existence of homosexuality could therefore serve God's purposes.

Someone might argue at this point that, if our analysis were correct, we should be able to find empirical evidence to confirm it. In fact, however, misogyny can be observed to persist in cultures which accept homosexuality. Consider, for example, the culture of ancient Greece, where widespread acceptance of homosexuality was accompanied by the unambiguous subordination of women.²⁶

This example is interesting because it affords a clarification of our main point. In particular, the prevailing form of homosexuality in ancient Greece was hierarchical, occurring between a mature mentor and a young student. If this is the accepted and preponderant model of homosexuality, it does nothing to undermine myths about the essentially hierarchical nature of human sexual expression. At most, it might imply that immature, uneducated males are not better than adult women, and are interchangeable with them for sexual purposes. In other words, it expands the class of humans subject to sexual subordination to include young men as well as women. Acceptance of homosexuality undermines misogynous myths, then, only when that acceptance extends to sex between persons of the same gender who are perceived to be of comparable status. (It should be noted here, however, that some of the more conservative Greeks saw, even in the hierarchical form of homosexuality sanctioned in some Greek states, a threat to misogynous notions of masculinity. In Plutarch's *Eroticus*, Daphneaus says "But the "favour" of boys, which, if they are reluctant, depends on violent rape, and, if they are willing, signifies that they surrender themselves unnaturally, out of softness and effeminacy, to be "covered,"...that so called "favour" is favourless, indecent, and loveless.")²⁷

More broadly, however, the pursuit of empirical evidence in this case seems unfruitful. Because cultures vary in so many subtle ways, and because the effect of those variations are often quite difficult to ascertain, it would be close to impossible to trace the empirical link between misogyny and the acceptance of homosexuality in any conclusive way. Any statistically observable association between misogyny and homophobia might be the result of historic events or deeper cultural complexities that have very little to do with the logical links between them.

What is important to remember is that we are not claiming that the accep-

tance of homosexuality *will* bring an end to—or even markedly reduce—misogyny. Our argument does not depend on making such claims, and, therefore, does not depend on discovering unambiguous empirical links between the two. Rather, our point is a far less consequentialist one: if homosexuality is regarded as legitimate, then one of the prevailing rationales for misogyny becomes untenable. It is in this way that homosexuality challenges misogyny and hence supports the natural order between males and females. The practical effect of this support need not be large in order for our argument to succeed. In fact, given the complex causes of such phenomena as misogyny, it is unlikely that one isolated social change will have a major impact. But the impact of homosexuality need not be statistically significant in order for it to support the heterosexual order: Mother Teresa supported the fight against poverty even if, in the broad picture, her work hardly made a dent in the problem.

It is worth noting, however, that some empirical observations lend support to our analysis. Consider the commonly observed correlation between sexism and homophobia: those who are most committed to the traditional subordination of women are also most opposed to homosexuality, often responding to it with considerable violence.²⁸ We can understand this correlation once we see that homosexuality undermines the myths which vindicate sexism. Sexist men are disgusted by homosexuality—especially male homosexuality—because in conceiving of sex as essentially hierarchical they are forced to envision homosexual couplings as couplings in which one man is degraded from the status of a man (superior) to the status of a woman (inferior). The only way to avoid this image is to reconceive their view of human sexuality—something which threatens their mythic vision of male superiority and which, if accepted, would force them to expend the kind of character-building effort and sensitive communication which Cameron takes to be the special good of heterosexuality. These facts may also explain why feminist movements have been typically accepting and supportive of homosexuality.

VI: Objections

Several objections to this line of argument need to be dealt with. First of all, someone might argue that the possible good consequences for heterosexual unions are not sufficient to grant homosexuality a status of moral legitimacy.²⁹ This is especially true when we consider homosexuality from a Christian perspective, in which some activities have traditionally been regarded as intrinsically wrong no matter what the consequences. Homosexuality might be just such an activity. If so, then our argument fails to vindicate homosexuality precisely because it seeks to do so through appeal to consequences.

To sharpen this objection, consider the following example: sex with non-human animals has been traditionally regarded as immoral, and even should it prove that regarding sex of this sort as legitimate would force us to abandon certain harmful myths about heterosexuality, few of us would regard that fact alone as sufficient grounds to justify bestiality.

This objection fails in the current context because it does not take into account the reason *why* homosexuality is regarded as wrong on the holistic

argument. Clearly, whatever our reasons for objecting to bestiality, the belief that bestiality goes against heterosexuality is probably not the main or principal reason. Thus, showing that bestiality does not go against heterosexuality would not be sufficient to justify it. According to the holistic argument, homosexuality is wrong precisely because it supposedly undermines or goes against heterosexuality. But if *that* is the reason why homosexuality is thought to be wrong, then an argument which shows that homosexuality does not undermine heterosexuality but, on the contrary, helps to further the special goods of heterosexuality, is entirely decisive. Therefore, if one is to dismiss our argument on the grounds that it appeals to consequences, one must have a different reason for thinking homosexuality wrong than those put forward in the holistic argument. The holistic argument, however, has been developed precisely because more traditional arguments have failed to show that homosexuality is wrong.

A second objection might be leveled against what we take to be the special good associated with heterosexuality. Someone might want to argue that we are mistaken in believing that the guarantee of character building challenges is the special good for which God created humans with two sexes. Since our case for the permissibility of homosexuality is based upon this view of the special good of heterosexuality, our argument fails if the special good is something else. Or, more precisely, our argument succeeds only in showing that *this* special good cannot serve as a basis for condemning homosexuality; some other candidate for the special good of heterosexuality might provide the sought-for basis.

This is an important challenge, but it is incomplete unless some plausible alternative good is proposed, one which homosexuality does in fact undermine. As we have already noted, procreation cannot be regarded as the special good of heterosexuality since God could have arranged the world such that same-sex couplings resulted in procreation. While pleasure or intimacy are both legitimate possibilities, both are achievable outside the heterosexual context; therefore, homosexuality cannot undermine them.

Someone might argue that the special good of heterosexuality lies in nothing other than the very master-servant hierarchy envisioned in what we have called the "mythology" of misogyny. If this is right, then in undermining that hierarchy, homosexuality does go against or undermine heterosexuality, and hence God's plan.

The problem with this view is precisely that it commits itself to calling misogyny a good. But this is clearly too high a cost to pay in order to condemn homosexuality. The *prima facie* case against misogyny is far stronger than the *prima facie* case against homosexuality. Misogyny bears all the ordinary markers of wrongful behavior: it has a suffering victim and a perpetrator who benefits at the expense of the victim; it is driven by selfishness and characterized by feelings of animosity and aggression; it tends to promote alienation and separation, rather than community, therefore going against the central Christian themes of love and reconciliation.

Homosexuality bears none of these marks (although, ironically, homophobia does). Thus, to call homosexuality wrong on these grounds is to base one's argument on a premise that is more likely to be false than the negation of its conclusion. This amounts to question-begging.

Perhaps, however, one can embrace a kind of hierarchy in heterosexual relationships that is distinct enough from the misogynous sort to avoid the normal marks of sin. There are, after all, hierarchical relationships that need not involve a victim and a victimizer: the teacher/student relationship; the parent/child relationship; the supervisor/employee relationship; and, most especially the Creator/creature relationship. Perhaps there is a hierarchy of this sort in heterosexual partnership, and perhaps it is this sort of hierarchy which constitutes the special good of heterosexuality.

Non-oppressive hierarchies which might be regarded as good typically come in two forms. First, there are those hierarchies, such as we find between teacher and student, in which the party in the superior position is in some way the benefactor of the party in the inferior position.³⁰ This kind of hierarchy depends, therefore, on the superior party having resources that the inferior party lacks, and the inferior party having needs which can be satisfied by the superior party's resources. Furthermore, there cannot be a comparable relationship the other way; if both parties have comparable needs which can be met by the resources of the other, we would typically regard this not as a hierarchy but as a symbiotic partnership.

Occasionally, however, relationships of mutual benefit are nevertheless hierarchical in a non-oppressive way. These constitute the second kind of non-oppressive hierarchy. In these hierarchies, the relationship is created in order to pursue certain common purposes or objectives; when each party contributes what the other lacks for the attainment of these objectives, the distinct contribution that one party makes is more immediately and centrally connected with those objectives than the contribution of the other. (Consider, for example, the different roles played by a quarterback and an offensive lineman in achieving the objectives of football.)

While it is true that men have historically been the benefactors of their wives, this has been the case only because social structures have deprived women of the resources allowed to men. Thus, this sort of hierarchy would be worthy of preserving only if the social structures which rendered it necessary were either unavoidable or themselves good. Neither seems to be the case. When it comes to the idea that there is a common set of objectives for which men and women are united, and that one party to the relationship is more centrally and immediately responsible for achieving these objectives than the other, we confront a new problem. If this kind of differential contribution to shared objectives were the basis for a hierarchy, then the hierarchy would not itself be the special good of heterosexuality. Rather, whatever objectives were served by the hierarchy would be the special good. The most obvious objective to which men and women contribute differently is procreation, which we have already said cannot be the special good of heterosexuality (and which, ironically, would likely place the woman above the man in the hierarchy). In any event, hierarchy in this sense has value only derivatively and therefore cannot be the special good of heterosexuality.

Someone might, however, defend the traditional gender hierarchy in heterosexual partnerships on somewhat more subtle (and distinctively Christian) grounds. There is no question that intimate sexual partnerships have an important place in the lives of those who participate in them. In fact, many people consider their lives fundamentally incomplete without such a

partnership. For a Christian, this fact can be the source of a significant concern: there is the danger that the intimate sexual relationship will become more important to the participants than their relationship with God. Prioritizing a human relationship over the divine relationship is a form of idolatry, and in the Christian context must be condemned. If, however, the intimate sexual relationship were to somehow mirror or represent in symbolic form the relationship between human beings and God, then this danger of idolatry could be undercut. If the most important human relationship in your life becomes a vehicle for understanding and reflecting the relationship between human beings and God, then rather than usurping the place of the latter relationship it would serve to further that relationship.

But a human relationship, if it is to successfully mirror the relationship between humans and God, must itself be hierarchical. If the special good of heterosexual partnerships is that they remind us and teach us about how we should relate to God, then heterosexual partnerships must have an element of hierarchy. Furthermore, any intimate relationship which lacked such hierarchy would not be able to serve its proper function, and would therefore be in danger of becoming idolatrous.³¹

One could argue, further, that the hierarchy would have to eschew oppressive misogyny if it were to succeed in mirroring the human relation with the divine. One partner would have to be a powerful and loving caregiver and provider, concerned with giving the other partner the necessities of survival as well as love and comfort and the freedom to pursue desired ends, whereas the other partner would have to be an obedient and grateful servant, concerned with glorifying and furthering the will of the superior partner.

While this view of heterosexual partnerships has a certain poetic quality, it fails to serve as an adequate account for a number of reasons. The most important problem is that the differences between men and women cannot be compared, either in degree or character, to the differences between human beings and God. In fact, men and women are very much alike, so much so that one would be hard pressed (once freed from the thrall of traditional views) to find any basis for deciding which gender should play the role of God and which should play the role of the human in the heterosexual partnership. Any such decision would, it seems, have to be arbitrary—and if so, the gender difference is not essential to the hierarchy. This means that even if we accept that this kind of hierarchy must be central to truly Christian sexual relationships, there is no reason to prefer heterosexual over homosexual partnerships.

The main point here is that there is nothing natural or intrinsic to the genders which makes one gender uniquely suited to be the provider for the other, and the other uniquely suited to be the obedient and grateful servant of the first. We do find such a relationship in the human domain, but the relationship is that between parent and child. One might try to argue that something in the heterosexual sex act itself serves to remind us of the relationship between humans and God, but again we would be hard-pressed to pinpoint just what that would be.

Another problem with this view is that it seems unlikely that the partner who takes the role of God (presumably the man in the traditional Christian

family) would learn from the relationship how to relate to God. While the subordinate partner in such a hierarchical relationship (traditionally the woman) might well be able to apply what she has learned from this human relationship to her religious life, the superior partner would learn nothing of the kind. In fact, there is a contrary danger that he will think too highly of himself.

In short, if there is a special good associated with heterosexual partnerships, one which homosexual partnerships lack, then it is likely to be of the sort which we initially spelled out following Cameron's lead. And if *this* is the special good of heterosexuality, then homosexuality does not go against that good, but rather serves it. Therefore, one cannot object to homosexuality on the grounds that it undermines the special good for which God created two sexes. The holistic argument fails. More broadly, it seems unlikely that the traditional Christian view regarding homosexuality can find any strong support within a broader Christian context—either a holistic biblical context, or a holistic natural law context. Thus, this traditional view should be abandoned.

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NOTES

1. Cf. *Summa Theologica* Pt. II-II, Q. 154, a. 2.
2. *Genesis* 19:4-11, *Leviticus* 18:22 and 20:13, *Romans* 1:25-27, *I Timothy* 1:10, *I Corinthians* 6:9.
3. *ST*, Pt. II-II, Q. 154, a. 12.
4. See Alan Donagan's critique of the traditional Catholic doctrine in *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) p. 106.
5. Christine Gudorf lays out a particularly challenging critique of proof-texting, arguing that it contributes to victimization in her book *Victimization: Examining Christian Complicity*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), especially ch. 1. For an account of general difficulties with proof-texting, see Gustaf Aulen, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, trans. by Eric Wahlstrom and G. Everett Arden (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948) pp. 81-85. For a detailed criticism of the traditional scriptural arguments against homosexuality, see James Nelson, *Embodiment* (Augsburg Press: Minneapolis, 1978) pp. 186-188.
6. "The Bible and Sexual Boundaries," in *The Lutheran Quarterly*, 7 (1993) pp. 375-390.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 378-83.
9. *Contemporary Moral Problems*, 4th edition, James E. White, ed. (Minneapolis: West Publishing, 1994) pp. 341-9.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 346.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 347-8.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 348.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Assuming, of course, that sexual orientation is not chosen.
16. On this see Gonsiorek and Weinrich, *Homosexuality: Research Implications for Public Policy* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991) pp. 4-5.

17. *Ibid.*. Further evidence for this claim is provided by the fact that, even in many countries very intolerant of homosexuality, homosexual night clubs and other establishments can be found. Thus the *Spartacus International Gay Guide 1994-95* (Bruno Gmunder: Berlin, 1994) lists a total of 28 gay bars, clubs, hotels and restaurants in Egypt, 7 in Saudi Arabia, 10 in Syria, and so on. Of course, in comparison with European countries and the Americas, these numbers are small; but the very existence of gay establishments in the Moslem world is further evidence of the ubiquity of homosexuality and of the inability of social intolerance to eradicate it completely.

18. Ailsa Steckel, "Psychological Development of Children of Lesbian Mothers," in *Gay and Lesbian Parents*, F.W. Bozett, ed. (New York: Praeger Publications, 1987) pp. 76-7.

19. See, for example, Alan Bell, Martin Weinberg, and Sue K. Hammersmith, *Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) esp. p. 211.

20. We are indebted to an anonymous reader for *F&P* for this objection.

21. On this see, for example, *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, article 2, epitome, article 1, in *The Book of Concord*, trans. By G. Tappert, et al. (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1958).

22. In this regard, the careful way in which the 18th century Orthodox Lutheran theologian David Hollaz distinguished the natural desires themselves of fallen humanity from their corruption, is worth quoting. "The word *concupiscentia*...is ambiguous; either it denotes a natural power of desiring, or some superadded perverse inclination. Between the former and the latter there is an enormous difference. For the one is a natural appetite of man or an appetitive power of the soul which is conceived as the subject or material cause of original sin, and the other is the original evil or concupiscentia, which corrupts that power, and which formally constitutes original sin. Further, the first is from God, the second is not; the first is a positive and created entity strictly taken, the second is not; the first is had indeterminately (*indifferenter*), the second is had determinately (*determinate*); the first is a natural power created with (*concreata*) human nature, the second is a superadded and introduced quality; the first perfects human nature, the second destroys and contaminates it." *Examen theologicum acroamaticum*, Part II, cap. III, q. 18, obs. IV.

23. Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, book XI, c. 22, book XII, c.3; J. A. Quenstedt, *Theologica didactico et polemica* II, 62; Melancthon, *Loci communes* (1555), trans. as *On Christian Doctrine*, by Clyde L. Manschreck (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) Locus IV, p. 46.

24. On this see the astonishing, but by no means unusual, remark of the great 17th century Lutheran theologian John Gerhard that "As God is the beginning and the end, the One by whom and for whom man was directly and immediately made, so man is the beginning and end of the woman, for she was made out of man for the sake of man." *Loci theologici* IV, Locus 9, sect. VI, trans. by Herman Preus and Edmond Smits (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1962), p. 53.

25. Gudorf, p. 99.

26. This objection was suggested to us by an outside reader for *F&P* and by Bruce Reichenbach.

27. Translated by Donald Russell in *Plutarch: Selected Essays and Dialogues* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 251.

28. On this see Gonsiorek and Weinrich, p. 51.

29. This objection was suggested to us by Michael Gorman.

30. This is the sort of hierarchy that Aristotle seems to have endorsed.

31. This objection was suggested by students in Reitan's Moral Problems class.