



Blessing Same-Sex Marriages

PATRICIA BEATTIE JUNG

THE SHAPE OF THE QUESTION

Many argue—myself included—that some same-sex couples are married in the sight of God, despite the fact that this may not be recognized by most civil authorities, church officials, or people at large.¹ For example, my friend Ken wrote: “Stephen and I have enjoyed a committed relationship for the past twenty-eight years and many celebrate that with us. We have also been victimized by homophobes and bigots over the years. We have lost jobs because of prejudice and have experienced a great deal of hurt....Having a friendship with Stephen is not a prerequisite to maintaining a friendship with me. But acknowledging our relationship is.” Such commitment does not, however, characterize all couples who live in *de facto* unions.² Some who cohabit—heterosexual and homosexual alike—are sexual partners in deliberately non-nuptial fashions that “ignore, postpone, or even reject the conjugal commitment.”³

¹Christian Batalden Scharen, *Married in the Sight of God: Theology, Ethics and Church Debates over Homosexuality* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

²See the thorough discussion in Adrian Thatcher, *Living Together and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³The failure to make precisely this distinction between committed and non-committed unions flaws the Vatican’s analysis of the dramatic decline of marriage rates around the world and of the various legislative efforts in the European Union not to privilege marital unions. See Pontifical Council for the Family, *Family, Marriage and ‘De Facto’ Unions* (2000) §2 (available online under www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family).

Conjugal relationships can be properly blessed when they are voluntary, publicly and communally supported, steadfast, and sexually exclusive. These elements exclude the possibility of the church’s blessing of casual unions, but not necessarily the blessing of committed same-sex unions.

Premises about Marriage

What must marriage be like for it to be possible to be married before God but not *de jure*? First, marriage must be such that it is constituted by the promises of the couple themselves. Spouses do the marrying, not the state or the church, or their official representatives. Over the centuries many kinds of marriages that had been civilly prohibited—interracial and interreligious, as well as marriages covenanted between slave and free and among slaves—have received either official recognition by the church or the less formal blessing of Christian communities. Christians have not always agreed about which banned relationships to recognize as conjugal, as the debate over the marriages of religiously vowed persons during the Reformation era indicates. My point is not to argue that there is historical precedent for the blessing of same-sex marriages,⁴ nor to imply that marriage is a private matter, lacking a communal dimension. I simply want to establish that there is historical precedent for the blessing by some churches of marriages not recognized as such either by other churches or the state.

Second, marriage must be a process, which can begin long before a wedding and which must continue until the marriage is dissolved. At weddings the couple's love and pledges are publicly celebrated. It is certainly a point of no return in the process of "getting married." But communal support and prayers for God's continued blessing on a couple's life together may begin long before any ceremony.

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Third, whatever other motives lie behind their decision, most people marry because they love each other. Ironically, this romanticism obscures what it is that people are actually doing. When they marry, spouses promise that they *will* love each other, that is, (continue to) learn how to love each other through and into an unpredictable future. Implicit in their commitment to continue making love is the promise to do whatever is necessary to support and sustain that lovemaking. This is why spouses explicitly promise that their life together will be sexually exclusive and end only with death. They promise to be faithful—steadfast and monogamous—lovers. A more detailed explanation of why Christians believe love requires such fidelity will be developed at the close of this essay.

Probable Cultural Implications

The celebration of same-sex marriages signals far more than protection for or

⁴Evidence in support of the claim that passionate same-sex relationships were blessed by the church can be found in John Boswell's *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villiard Books, 1994); Valerie Abrahamson's "Burials in Greek Macedonia: Possible Evidence for Same-Sex Committed Relationships in Early Christianity," *The Journal of Higher Criticism* 4/2 (1997) 33-56; and more recently (2001) in the analyses of burial memorials in British churches dating from the fourteenth through the nineteenth centuries, developed by Alan Bray. What is debated is whether or not the clearly passionate love relationships so commemorated were sexual.

tolerance of such relationships. Such liturgies will teach that when these relationships are part of a solemn covenant, such joyous desires and erotic activities—like their heterosexual counterparts—can be morally good. Such a practice by churches triggers a review of civil laws regulating marriage. In July 2002, the provincial court of Ontario ruled that this Canadian province is obliged to recognize the right of gays in general to marry and specifically the right of one couple to register legally the marriage they had celebrated earlier in a Toronto church. Practically speaking, the same policy was adopted in 1999 when the state of Vermont erased from its laws virtually all practical distinctions between heterosexual marriages and homosexual civil unions. By one count, more than two hundred benefits are at stake in policies governing the civil licensing of marriages in North America.⁵

The blessing of same-sex marriages is likely to be personally formative as well. It is likely to increase the number of persons willing to self-identify as gay or lesbian, increase their safety (at least in the long run), and increase homosexual behavior particularly in just, loving, and faithful relationships. Blessing same-sex marriages says: “It is as good to be gay as it is to be straight!” Since our sexual orientations are socially constructed as well as biologically determined, it is likely to make the possibility of a same-sex relationship more attractive (than does our current cultural atmosphere) to those who are bisexual. Though it won’t much influence the lifestyles of those who are predominantly heterosexual or homosexual, it will make a gay or lesbian lifestyle more acceptable to those who “waver.”

Blessing same-sex marriages says as well: “It is good to marry!” Though marriage is far from obsolete, an increasing number of people within North Atlantic cultures find there are few, if any, compelling reasons to marry their sexual partners. It is my contention that marriage, as a Christian vocation, is threatened not by the covenants made by gay and lesbian couples but by the failure of the church to make good sense of such promise-making and promise-keeping. By blessing same-sex marriages the church can bear further witness to the value of such vows from a distinctively Christian perspective.

Moral Discernment

Vows to be steadfast and monogamous can be licensed by civil law, promoted by public policy, and/or, when at least one of the spouses is Christian, encouraged and blessed by churches. Should Christians not only recognize such commitments

⁵For example, attached to a civil marriage license are spousal immigration rights; the proxy privileges automatically attributed under the law to “the next of kin” in regard to medical decisions and funeral arrangements; a variety of financial benefits (both direct and transferred) from social security, Medicare, veterans and other pension plans; and spousal benefits associated with life and health insurance policies. Because their marriages are not legally recognized, gay and lesbian couples who live in *de facto* marriages cannot automatically file joint tax returns or acquire joint home, auto, or health insurance policies. They cannot automatically adopt or foster children as couples. They do not receive the protection afforded heterosexual couples by custody, domestic abuse, divorce, child support, estate, or inheritance laws. On the other side of the North Atlantic, the parliament of the European Union has asked that member nations stop treating gay and straight couples differently. In this regard Scandinavian countries have led the way. In Holland, laws governing matrimony, divorce, and adoption have dropped all references to gender. Even the dictionary has been amended to eliminate references to man and woman in its definition of marriage.

as valid (as they might a marriage consented to before a justice of the peace) but also offer to witness and pray for God's blessing on the vows made by faithful lesbian, gay, or bisexual Christians? Many people of genuine goodwill believe current practices, which privilege heterosexual and discriminate against homosexual covenants, are morally required. Gay marriage is for them an oxymoron. Others believe this ecclesial ban expresses only unjustifiable prejudice.

Ken's estranged friend replied to his letter: My Christian faith "does not allow me to hate homosexuals nor does it allow me to be judgmental of homosexuals. It does, however, prohibit my embracing or celebrating sexual activity between men." However much his response is mistaken, it must be conceded that he hit the nail on the head. This is precisely what the sanction of gay or lesbian marriages does: it embraces and celebrates homosexual activity in faithful covenants as potentially expressive and sustaining of Christian love.

Christian convictions have changed in regard to other moral matters, such as slavery, usury, the role of women, etc. The Bible itself bears witness to the possibility of such developments: consider the seismic shifts recorded in the New Testament about what it means to keep the Sabbath or to include Gentiles. But not all changes are developments in tune with the Scriptures and authentic traditions of the church. A cursory glance at church history reveals that not every change therein has been edifying. Time has shown some "developments" such as witch hunts, wars of religious intolerance, and the selling of indulgences were denigrations of what is authentic to faith. Our question is: Would the blessing of same-sex marriages be (1) a development in our moral tradition inspired by the ongoing activity of God who can still "do a new thing" (Isa 43:19), or (2) a dangerous degradation itself in need of reform?

Certainly there is consensus that some sexual relationships—for example, incestuous relationships—cannot be sanctified, if they remain sexual. Many who oppose the blessing of same-sex marriages believe them to be analogous kinds of relationships. Those who disagree believe not only that same-sex relationships can be redeemed but that precisely as sexual relationships they can be a path on which people can school each other in love. For them, God's plan for human sexuality is not monochromatic but diverse in design, a reflection of God's predilection for variety. Human sexual differences—in gender and orientation—reflect God's preference for and delight in, as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, myriad "dappled things."⁶ Our question might be reframed as: Which sexual differences among us are simply expressive of the "pied beauty" of life that God so treasures, and which are defects or disorders in it?

Christian moral discernment is based on several sources of wisdom. Two of these are distinctively Christian: Scripture and tradition. In the rest of this essay, I argue that the blessing of same-sex marriages is compatible with faithful interpretations of the Bible and that much of our authentic Christian tradition inclines us

⁶Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), "Pied Beauty": "Glory be to God for dappled things—."

toward such a development in our practice. Though not sufficient to make a complete case for blessing same-sex marriages, such considerations are crucial to such an argument.

THE BIBLE AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Virtually all Christians agree that one source of wisdom to be used in any process of moral discernment is the Bible. I contend that if we continue to study only the five to seven (depending upon certain key translation decisions) texts that deal directly with same-sex erotic activity, we will not make progress. The debate about how properly to interpret these texts has been raging for nearly two decades now without resolve. Why?

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The texts themselves—though clear in their condemnation of at least some sorts of same-sex erotic activity—do not speak directly to several other questions. Consequently, those wrestling with them must extrapolate from them. For example, liberals conclude on the basis of the study of their historical context that these texts condemn only *some* types of same-sex activity (such as pederasty or same-sex activity associated with sexual slavery or prostitution or purity concerns). Conservatives conclude that these texts condemn *all* types of same-sex activity, including that which we might associate with ostensibly just, loving, and committed (monogamous and steadfast) relationships.

Much hinges on what frames the interpretive process, particularly the assumptions about human sexual diversity that interpreters bring to these texts. Conservatives are apt to find that these texts confirm the assumptions they bring: given the “heterosexual structure of God’s creation,” it follows that God would forbid all same-sex erotic activity. Similarly, liberals are apt to find that these texts confirm the assumptions they bring: God’s created sexual order is diverse; consequently only some same-sex activities, like some other-sex activities, are forbidden by God.

Those party to these debates grow increasingly self-conscious of this hermeneutical circle. One author notes that “the big picture of the Bible” on the issue of homosexual practice is the complementarity of male-female sexual bonds.⁷ Another describes these convictions about gender complementarity as the symbolic or narrative framework that undergirds debates about sexuality.⁸ The debate about

⁷Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001).

⁸James P. Hanigan, “Unitive and Procreative Meaning: The Inseparable Link,” in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph A. Coray (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001) 22-38.

the Creator's design for human sexuality—about whether it is uniformly heterosexual—hinges on how Gen 1-3 (and therefore implicitly Mark 10:5-9)⁹ are interpreted.

In several respects the traditional interpretation of these texts has been contested. Traditionally they have been understood to reveal that all sexual relationships should be patriarchal, either by God's original design or as a deserved punishment for sin. Many have reinterpreted these texts and now see all patterns of domination and submission in sexual relationships (including those associated with patriarchy) to be a consequence of the fall and identified as sin.

No one doubts that in Gen 1 sexual differentiation is associated with fecundity. What is debated is the precise nature of this link. Though English translations of Genesis carry imperative connotations, "be fruitful" is now interpreted as more of a blessing than a command. Consequently, not only so-called "natural" family planning and artificial contraception but also, within marriage, oral sex and the erotic activity of pregnant and postmenopausal women are no longer condemned (as they once were) by most churches. The biblical testimony about the link between sexuality and procreativity has been reinterpreted. Marital heterosexual activity is judged holy if it is lovemaking, that is, if spouses receive each other as friends the way we have been received by Christ. Their sexual pleasures require no further legitimation. Openness to the possibility of having children is not generally taught to be an essential aspect of sexual love, except by Roman Catholic officials. If it is not in fact necessary for the sanctification of sexual activity, why should its iconic representation be required of Christian spouses?

At the heart of the debate about same-sex marriage is the role of gender complementarity. Does Gen 2 reveal the Creator's design for sexual companionship to be exclusively heterosexual? According to traditional interpretations, men and women are given different natures, designed by God to complement each other, so that only when they bond together can they be whole. Many have concluded on the basis of this interpretation that diversity in sexual orientation is not part of God's plan but a "disorder" objectively (at least) associated with sin. As the placards put it: God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.

But this interpretation is not necessitated by the silence about same-sex or the celebration of other-sex marriages in Gen 2. In fact there are several reasons to question this interpretation: (1) The text does not specify why Adam is lonely. This loneliness is a problem whose *solution* is associated with sexual differentiation, but nothing in the text suggests it was *caused* by the absence of a differently gendered complement. Indeed, the Hebrew terms that specify male and female do not occur in the text until the Creator puts Adam to sleep. Only then does the text suggest that humankind was sexually differentiated. (2) The only creatures specified in the

⁹Stephen F. Noll, "Two Sexes, One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Unions," *Theology Matters* 6/3 (2000) 1-16. Noll vividly exemplifies this step in the interpretive process when he imaginatively extrapolates what Jesus would say about blessing same-sex marriage on the basis of these texts.

text as unfit sexual partners are from different species. They are unsuitable because they are not human. Gender is not explicitly identified as a criterion for complementarity. (3) The text does explicitly suggest that Eve is suitable for partnership not because she is sexually “other” than Adam (though obviously she is) but instead because she is human. Adam does not cry out “*Vive la différence!*” but exclaims, “Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.” The story emphasizes the similarities between these two at least as much as, if not more than, their differences.

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It is reasonable to conclude that the creation accounts found in Genesis do not reveal the order of creation to be exclusively heterosexual and/or that same-sex partnerships are incongruent with God’s design for human sexuality. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that the biblical texts that prohibit same-sex activity might well be referring to only some forms of such behavior. Still, nowhere in the Scriptures does one find an endorsement of same-sex erotic covenants like that given to male-female unions in Gen 1 and 2 and later in the Song of Songs. Thus, it is appropriate to ask whether and how the blessing of same-sex marriages might cohere with broader, biblical-inspired traditions about Christian discipleship, sexuality, and marriage. To the task of exploring the compatibility of such a practice with general Christian anthropological assumptions we now turn.

CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Christian convictions about the human condition revealed in Jesus Christ shape our understandings of both the church’s corporate mission and the range of vocations—sexual and otherwise—appropriate to faithful discipleship. Christians understand themselves in light of what they know about God. Ours is a theological anthropology. Christians believe that the God in whose image people have been created is trinitarian. In the perfect community of love that is the Trinity, communion is at the heart of being. Gender is not relevant to this dance. Yet this is precisely the kind of interrelationship Jesus prays we might also enjoy (John 17:21-23).¹⁰

Discipleship as Friendship

People are not just social, but created in relation to and destined for communion with God, each other, indeed all of creation. We were not made to sing solos, but to join a huge chorus of creatures and stars in praise of God. All our relationships—including our sexual relationships—are to reflect the sort of loving companionship revealed in the Trinity.

¹⁰Daniel A. Helminiak, “The Trinitarian Vocation of the Gay Community,” in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 318-327.

We are made to make beautiful music together, but we are easily harmed in such engagements. We find ourselves to be “radically available” and potentially vulnerable to one another.¹¹ This nearness to each other is not something we choose or construct. It is the human condition. We can embrace it or join in a collusion with others to deny it. What the incarnation makes clear is that God embraces it. God is with us, not to rescue us from but to sanctify our life together, to heal the nations. God dwells in the messy details of the world, affirms our life together, and calls us to join in making it holy.

Without a question, heterosexual marriage is one biblically-based paradigm for life together. But in the Bible, friendships—like that between Ruth and Naomi, and those between Jesus and his beloved disciple, the Twelve and Mary, Martha and Lazareth—are upheld and celebrated as of God more often than marriage. In the Gospel of John, “the model of friendship emerges as the paradigm...for the human vocation to embrace the other...and to practice hospitality.”¹² Such friendships are “human relationships that are entered into by people who intend one another’s well-being and who intend that their love relationship is part of a justice-seeking community.”¹³ Of significance to this model is neither gender complementarity nor a mandate to procreate but the willingness to lay down one’s life. Such sacrifice for one’s friends may be literal, but more often than not the cross is taken up in everyday choices.

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Christians value ordinary life together because only then can we really know and sanctify each other, that is, embody for each other God’s befriending of all that is. By defining Christian discipleship in terms of friendship, we see that married couples—gay and straight—are not disconnected from other Christians who live out our common calling as disciples to friendship as single or in community.

Traditionally, there have been three ways to practice Christian householding: (1) We are most accustomed today to the intimacies of married life, wherein householders share their bodies and beds, meals, prayers, work, resources and are present with each other at birth and death. (2) Members of religious orders and monastic communities share room and board (but not their beds), worship, work, resources and are present with each other at the hour of death. They, too, grow quite familiar with each other. (3) Because in the past anchorites and pilgrims, and today many

¹¹This essay is deeply indebted to the insights of Thomas E. Breidenthal as summarized in “Sanctifying Nearness,” in *Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the Household of God*, ed. Charles Hefling (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1996) 45-57, and developed in more detail in his *Christian Households: The Sanctification of Nearness* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1997).

¹²Mary Catherine Hilkert, “*Imago Dei*: Does the Symbol Have a Future?” *The Santa Clara Lectures*, April 14, 2002 (Santa Clara, CA: Santa Clara University) 18.

¹³Mary E. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 29.

singles, intentionally live in solitude, we may not think of this type of householding as potentially oriented toward life together. But it can be. When Christians practice being single their aim is not to escape from those who draw near, but to be available to offer hospitality, care, friendship, and refuge to all whom they encounter.

On the one hand, the danger of familiarity is that it might get in the way of our being hospitable to strangers who draw near. Christian households should have “open doors.” And as Jesus so pointedly insisted, the very familiarity bred in family life and small communities may block our ability to recognize and genuinely love the “strangers” whom the world recognizes as our kin. On the other hand the dangers associated with solitude are two. Such a lifestyle might function as a mode of escape from real relations with others; or, without “family” with whom to school our capacity to love, the ostensibly more inclusive hospitality practiced by singles might well be shallow.

All Christian forms of life together entail certain risks: that we will harm others, that we will ourselves be harmed, or that together we will collude to block the development of genuine communion. Christian householding should be marked by godly companionship and the mutual blessing for our bodies.¹⁴ Not every imaginable kind of householding—“living together” without any nuptial commitment, for example—enables people to avoid these risks and move toward these goals. But before we finalize our evaluation of the compatibility of gay marriage with Christian friendship, we need to unearth our theological assumptions about both sexuality and marriage.

Friendship and Sexuality

That we are radically available to one another (for good or ill) is revealed through our bodies. They are a prime source of our vulnerability. And yet, it is because we are embodied that we can belong to one another and taste the communion for which we were made. This is the body’s grace. We can be “formed in our humanity by the loving delight of another.”¹⁵ Sexual desire enables us to know ourselves as significant and wanted, as an occasion of joy for another. Lovers become and find in one another’s arms the delightful persons they were meant to be. Eros empowers us to make some connections between our deepened sense of vulnerability, the needs of others, and our power to change the world. Nurturing touch fuels our capacity to work for justice.

Sexual desire is relationally structured so that individuals are unable truly to satisfy their desires alone. Solitary sexual activity may relieve tension but it won’t prove delightful. Sexual pleasure in its fullness comes with knowing oneself to be pleasing another. We need our desire to be reciprocated; we want to be wanted. Yet in order to avoid the considerable risk of being rejected—of striking another as re-

¹⁴Breidenthal, *Christian Households*, 94.

¹⁵Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in Hefling, *Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies*, 65. Williams attributes his understanding of the moral significance of the inherent relational or mirroring structure of sexual desire to Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 44-50.

pellent or foolish—we are tempted to establish asymmetrical sexual relationships that pervert the orientation toward reciprocity inherent to desire.

Sexual desire (especially when it erupts and surprises us) is a vivid, unpredictable reminder that human connectedness is not a consequence of choice. We can choose not to act on our sexual desires but we have no control over when, whether, or for whom they arise. Instead they are a fact of our life, affirmed by Christians as God's good handiwork that we are called through our discipleship to Christ to sanctify.

Sexual desire reveals or registers our condition as "radically available" to one another. Given the sinful character of the human condition, this must be recognized not only as a source of joy but also of danger for us and others. The Christian affirmation of the essential goodness of sexuality should be wholehearted but not naive. We must be alert to its pitfalls. Such "sobriety is not prudishness."¹⁶ Christians await the resurrection of their bodies and recognize the need to mold their sexual relationships so that everyone impacted—especially the weak—can flourish.

Friendship and Marriage

Fidelity—the commitment to be steadfast and sexually exclusive—helps us build sexual relationships that are reasonably safe and pathways to holiness. That it offers no magic guarantee of this goes without saying. But when we gather to celebrate the wedding of two lives, we are declaring the moral value of sexual love and of the fidelity that enables us to integrate our sexual desire into the whole of our life. Within marriage we can show one another just how steadfastly and attentively God loves us. We are celebrating the creation of a context where we hope and pray the body's grace will abound.

Christians bless marriages because they oppose sexual repression, but it is important not to equate this with every type of genital restriction. Sexual repression results in the shutting down of our general capacity to feel joy, compassion, even pain. Repression is rightly linked with political apathy and social passivity. In this sense, eros is what fuels our service to justice and is essential to human well-being. But it is wrong to argue that the channeling of our passions into either celibate or faithful relationships—what some call "compulsory monogamy"—dulls or numbs our capacity to care.¹⁷

Steadfastness. Christians bless marriages because we oppose the promiscuous indulgence and/or the predatory, exploitative expression of sexual desire. Christians judge immoral even uncoerced, relatively healthy (safe), reproductively responsible, egalitarian, and honest exchanges of sexual favors between competent adults, when most in our culture do not. This does not mean people never experience grace in more transitory sexual encounters. But the practice of casual, recrea-

¹⁶Stanley Hauerwas and Allen Verhey, "From Conduct to Character—A Guide to Sexual Adventure," in Thatcher and Stuart, *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, 175-181.

¹⁷Mary Elizabeth Hobgood makes exactly this error in "Constructing a Compassionate Sexuality," *Dismantling Privilege* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000) 107-137.

tional sex most often denigrates people because what is physical cannot be easily separated from what is spiritual (our intellects and emotions), and when these vital links are severed our own and/or our partner's capacity to embody a fuller, more integrated sexual commitment is damaged.¹⁸

Sexual Exclusivity. Infidelity is not problematic primarily because a promise is broken. Even when permitted in so-called "open" marriages, infidelity is wrong in part because the unfaithful partner fails "to take responsibility for...(the one) who is vulnerable to hurt when attention and care go elsewhere."¹⁹ Consent alone is inadequate as a sexual ethic; we often agree to what is not good and refuse what might have enriched.

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Throughout Christian history the exclusivity of sexual relationships has been viewed with suspicion. Today, some Christian theologians associate the bonds established in married and family life with an excessive, perhaps even idolatrous, valuation of them over the kinship established by baptism.²⁰ And this may be a danger to which those called into marriage must be alert. But surely sexual partnerships require more than steadfastness. Even those highly suspicious of associating same-sex covenants with (heterosexual) marriages concede "there is a difference between most friendships and those expressed in the complete mutual bodily self-giving of sexual intercourse." Because we are so vulnerable and need assurance that our partner will be there tomorrow, explicit commitments to that effect are required. By nature fragile, such relationships "need attention and concentration to survive. [They are]...vulnerable to disconnection and to entropy."²¹

Faithfulness to the biblical witness does not necessarily rule out the blessing of same-sex marriages. Such relationships are not only compatible with Christian anthropology in general, but biblically inspired convictions about discipleship, sexuality and marriage all point toward the blessing of such covenants. ⊕

PATRICIA BEATTIE JUNG is an associate professor and graduate programs director of theology at Loyola University Chicago. She has coedited and coauthored several books in the field of Christian sexual ethics. She has been married for nearly thirty years, during which she and her husband raised three sons.

¹⁸Catherine M. Wallace, *For Fidelity: How Intimacy and Commitment Enrich Our Lives* (New York: Knopf, 1998) 57-63.

¹⁹Breidenthal, *Christian Households*, 136.

²⁰Kathy Rudy, *Sex and the Church* (Boston: Beacon, 1997).

²¹Elizabeth Stuart, "Lesbian and Gay Relationships: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective," in Thatcher and Stuart, *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, 310-311.