

Broadening the Family of God: Debating Same-sex Marriage and Queer Families in America

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Abstract

Since the United States Supreme Court overturned state sodomy statutes in its 2003 decision, *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas*, religious and political conservatives in America have feared that the decision could pave the way for legalization of same-sex marriage. No longer able to rely on the illegality of same-sex relationships to deny the legal protections of marriage to those relationships, conservatives have had to rely on broader discourses from which to argue against same-sex marriage. One particularly powerful discourse claims that marriage must be confined to heterosexual relationships in order to protect children. This paper explores the various discourses surrounding heterosexual marriage and families that are commonly employed in the ongoing debates about same-sex marriage in America today. First, the paper explores the ways in which psychoanalysis requires heterosexuality to articulate a theory of childhood development, comparing the dynamics of psychoanalytic discourse in both France and America. Second, the paper critiques common Christian theological claims of marriage, focusing on the theology and ethics of Karl Barth. Having explored psychological and theological claims, the paper ends by pointing to progressive Christian communities as sites from which alternative theologies and rituals are developing that illuminate broader expressions of family.

In April 2003, US Senator Rick Santorum (Republican, Pennsylvania) garnered national publicity (though little actual criticism) when he stated his opinion regarding the then-pending case of *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas*, a case in which the US Supreme Court would make a judgment as to the constitutionality of anti-sodomy laws:

If the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual (gay) sex within your home, then you have the right to bigamy, you have the right

to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. You have the right to anything.¹

By 9 July of that year, a mere three months later, Santorum's position had moved from disapproval to an expressed need to legislate, a position he articulated in an editorial column in *USA Today*:

I believe that Congress has an obligation to take action to defend the legal status of marriage before the Supreme Court or individual state supreme courts take away the public's ability to act. Every civilization since the beginning of man has recognized the need for marriage. This country and healthy societies around the world give marriage special legal protection for a vital reason—it is the institution that ensures the society's future through the upbringing of children.²

On 14 July, a mere five days after Santorum had written his words, Maggie Gallagher, the staunch, right-wing syndicated columnist, weighed in on the issue in a column in *The National Review*:

We are poised to lose the gay-marriage battle badly. Arguments about a slippery slope to polygamy are not untrue, but ineffectual, signs of a profound weakness in our culture of marriage. Polygamy is not worse than gay marriage, it is better. At least polygamy, for all its ugly defects, is an attempt to secure stable mother-father families for children. What is missing from this and many other analyses on this issue is a declaration of the stakes. Gay marriage is not some sideline issue, it is the marriage debate. Losing it...means losing marriage as a social institution, a shared public norm. Marriage will become (as it is in Sweden) a religious rite, with little public or social significance. As a legal institution, marriage will lose its coherence. By embracing gay marriage the legal establishment will have declared that the public purposes of marriage no longer include anything to do with making babies, or giving children mothers and fathers.³

2003 was a time of sexual disorientation for the political right in America. How could it be that the esteemed Senator could defend the continued enforcement of anti-sodomy laws in April for fear that legalization would lead to polygamy when, by July, Ms Gallagher, hardly a siren temptress of sexual free love, was holding up polygamy as a morally superior form of relationship to same-sex marriage? Maybe Mr Santorum was right: gay people's sexual lives and sexual relationships are so

1. 'G.O.P. Senator's Remarks on Gays Draws Fire', *The New York Times*, 22 April 2003, sec. A, p. 21.

2. Rick Santorum, 'Americans Must Preserve Institution of Marriage', *USA Today*, 9 July 2003; available from http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2003-07-09-opcom_x.htm (accessed 4 April 2005).

3. Maggie Gallagher, 'The Stakes: Why We Need Marriage', *National Review Online*; available from <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-gallagher071403.asp> (accessed 4 April 2003).

subversive that the mere decriminalization of sodomy led to the unfortunate sexual liberation of Maggie Gallagher. Alas, that is not the case. What happened, instead, was that the political right worked itself into quite a frenzy because gay and lesbian couples—even more so than those nightmarish heterosexual polygamists Ms Gallagher invokes—threaten to turn marriage into ‘nothing more than a religious rite’⁴ in which the overarching purpose of ‘making babies’ is forever lost.

Ms Gallagher’s column and Senator Santorum’s editorial represent early examples of the ways in which conservatives have doubled the discourse surrounding the defense of heterosexual marriage in America following the Supreme Court decision. That decision, which overturned sodomy statutes in individual states both on privacy and equal protection grounds, has led many conservatives to fear that the legal precedent set by the case opens the possibility for legal recognition of same-sex marriage. The religious and political right in America could no longer rely on the criminality of sodomy statutes to render same-sex marriage an impossibility; their option was to amend the US Constitution to limit the definition of marriage to a heterosexual union. However, a problem remained. Confronted with shifting cultural norms regarding the legitimacy of various intimate relationships, conservatives could no longer invoke either the criminality or the intrinsic sinfulness of same-sex relationships to galvanize public opinion for a marriage amendment. They needed to expand their claims about the need to protect marriage; they found it by invoking the protection of children.

Coalitions of conservative groups joined together to push for Constitutional amendments at both the state and federal level that limit the definition of marriage to a relationship between a man and a woman. Arguments in support of the amendments have been developed out of the American sacred space of the heterosexual family, a space filled with confusion and unrecognized contradictions. The family, conservatives claim, is in its final death throes while, at the same time, the only institution powerful enough to save us from the sinful effects of secular relativism and serve as the foundation for American culture. Not surprisingly, there is a growing chorus within the religious and political right that is taking this argument one step further: if same-sex marriage threatens heterosexual families (particularly the children of those families), then gay and lesbian couples raising children are already an actual, present *harm* to children. These claims are widely found in the literature

4. This is striking language from Ms Gallagher, who, of course, argues in social and political arenas that heterosexual marriage must be preserved without any change precisely on religious grounds.

of a number of 'family values' advocacy groups, including: The Family Research Council,⁵ The Traditional Values Coalition,⁶ The Family Research Institute,⁷ The American Family Association,⁸ Focus on the Family,⁹ Concerned Women for America,¹⁰ The Eagle Forum,¹¹ and The Marriage Law Project at Catholic University.¹² What had once been at best a peripheral issue for the political right has become a means to evoke an emotional response from the public faced with descriptions of lesbian and gay male couples rearing children in post-sodomy, anything-goes America. The success of the political and religious right in channelling that response into political action has been impressive. Though debates about a federal marriage amendment reveal some ambivalence both from elected officials and the general public to amend the US Constitution (as I stated above, this ambivalence at the national level necessitated invoking the protection of children from conservatives), lawmakers and citizens have readily amended state Constitutions by decisive margins to limit the legal definition of marriage.¹³

Any attempt to explore these myriad issues requires that we try to find whatever connections exist between straight marriages, gay marriages, straight families and gay families. Despite the self-evident tone of the rhetoric from those who have identified gay people as a threat to marriage, I am still uncertain as to what those connections are in America. That is

5. Available from <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IS01J3&f=PG03I03> (accessed 4 April 2005).
6. Available from <http://www.traditionalvalues.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1289> (accessed 4 April 2005).
7. Available from http://www.familyresearchinst.org/FRR_02_11.html (accessed 4 April 2005).
8. Available from <http://www.afa.net/activism/aa021102.asp> (accessed 4 April 2005).
9. Available from <http://www.family.org/welcome/press/a0020031.cfm> (accessed 4 April 2005).
10. Available from <http://www.cwfa.org/articles/4909/CWA/family/index.htm> (accessed 4 April 2005).
11. Available from <http://www.eagleforum.org/educate/2001/nov01/pro-gay-curricula.shtml> (accessed 4 April 2005).
12. Available from <http://marriagelaw.cua.edu/publications/nobasis.pdf> (accessed 4 April 2005).
13. Citizens from 11 states voted to amend their Constitutions to define marriage in the November 2004 election; the amendments passed with an average of 71 percent of the electorate voting in favor. Two other states voted in favor of such an amendment during their primary elections earlier in the year. Legal challenges on the constitutionality of the amendments will be mounted across the country. Ballot results available from <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/ballot.measures/> (accessed 4 April 2005).

not the case in other countries, specifically in France, where those connections have been spelled out. In 1999, the French government voted to recognize committed same-sex or different-sex relationships and to grant certain legal rights and responsibilities to the people in those relationships. The formal name for these legally recognized relationships is *Pacte Civil de Solidarité*, or PaCS for short. The sociologist Eric Fassin has shown the difference in content and context between those debates in France and the debates currently raging in America.¹⁴ In France, the question of the children of gay parents was central to the debates *from the beginning*. The questions and concerns articulated in the debate in France used structuralist psychoanalytic perspectives:

Intellectuals who had signed a petition for the recognition of same-sex couples in 1996 realized...that this logic could lead further than they were willing to go. This is when some attempted to find a solid foundation for the politics of *juste milieu* – what I call the conservative progressive politics of a 'halfway solution.' The foundation could not be found in political terms; this is why it was defined metapolitically, through the invocation of a 'symbolic order.' At the crossroads of anthropology and psychoanalysis, the French word *filiation* then became the cornerstone of this rhetoric, whose legal foundation it provided. *Filiation* structures the human psyche (as a symbolic link between parent and child) and at the same time culture itself (as consanguinity complements affinity) – does it not structure both through inheritance laws? Both 'symbolic order' and 'filiation' all of a sudden circulated in the public debate, with the terms being used by intellectuals and politicians alike. Psychoanalysts whose credibility had been eroded now regained an audience. The public relevance of anthropology, long forgotten, now became obvious: the name of Claude Lévi-Strauss was invoked in Parliament, right and left (somewhat paradoxically, and, as it turns out, against his will), and his successor in the Collège de France... expressed her political rejection of the PaCS as well as her belief in 'insurmountable' limits of thought resulting from sexual difference. The argument was that if sexual difference is defined within culture by the observation of nature, then it is the key, not only to (biological) reproduction, but also to (symbolic) *filiation*. This argument proved particularly powerful, as it provided intellectual legitimacy to the defense of a 'symbolic' (that is, social) order: the foundations of 'our' culture (the French nation) could be presented as the foundations of culture itself. 'Our' kinship system had a universal reality.¹⁵

Fassin describes the arguments various well-known French intellectuals made in support of the idea of a symbolic order; each of them utilized anthropological and psychoanalytic perspectives.¹⁶ The debate in France

14. Eric Fassin, 'Same Sex, Different Politics', *Public Culture* 13.2 (2001), pp. 215-32.

15. Fassin, 'Same Sex, Different Politics', pp. 225-26.

16. The French scholars Fassin mentions include sociologist Irène Théry, anthro-

turned upon structuralist concepts of the 'symbolic order' that were articulated using the scholarship of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Using these perspectives, intellectuals put forth an argument that human subjectivity — the experience of being an intelligible self — required the symbolic contribution of both the masculine and the feminine. In making such an argument, these scholars supported legal recognition of same-sex relationships but explicitly sought to limit the rights offered to gay and lesbian relationships to preclude access to reproductive technologies and adoption.

One of the prominent intellectuals who was involved in the French debate, the philosopher Sylviane Agacinski, is also the wife of Lionel Jospin, the French Prime Minister at the time.¹⁷ American scholar Judith Butler explores Agacinski's argument in detail:

Although Agacinski, the French philosopher, is not a Lacanian and, indeed, hardly a psychoanalyst, we do see in her commentary, which was prominent in the French debate, a certain anthropological belief that is shared by many Lacanian followers and other psychoanalytic practitioners in France and elsewhere. The belief is that culture itself requires that a man and a woman produce a child and that the child have this dual point of reference for its own initiation into the symbolic order, where the symbolic order consists of a set of rules that order and support our sense of reality and cultural intelligibility. She writes that gay parenting is both unnatural and a threat to culture in the sense that sexual difference, which is, in her view, irrefutably biological, gains its significance in the cultural sphere as the foundation of life in procreation. 'This foundation (of sexual difference) is generation; this is the difference between the paternal and maternal roles. There must be the masculine and the feminine to give life' (quoting Agacinski). Over and against this life-giving heterosexuality at the foundation of culture is the specter of homosexual parenting, a practice that not only departs from nature and from culture, but centers on the dangerous and artificial fabrication of the human and is figured as a kind of violence or destruction. She writes:

It takes a certain 'violence,' if one is homosexual, to want a child [Il faut une certaine 'violence,' quand on est homosexuel, pour vouloir un enfant]. ... I think that there is no absolute right to a child, since the right implies an increasingly artificial fabrication of children. In the interests of the child, one cannot efface its double origin.¹⁸

pologist Françoise Héretier and philosopher Sylviane Agacinski. See Fassin, 'Same Sex, Different Politics', pp. 224-27.

17. Fassin, 'Same Sex, Different Politics', p. 227.

18. Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Ethics* 13.1 (2002), pp. 14-44 (29). The translation of Agacinski's writing is Butler's.

As the debates surrounding the PaCS played out in France, psychoanalytic concepts of an intelligible symbolic order were invoked by opponents of same-sex parents in the academy, in the legislative bodies of the French government,¹⁹ and in the editorial pages of France's prominent daily newspapers.²⁰ The psychoanalytic subject took on anthropological significance and the story of human development, of becoming a self, was predicated on heterosexual parents. As Butler notes, in order for the PaCS legislation to pass, the law specifically denied same-sex couples the right to adoption or to access reproductive technologies. This is also the case, she notes, in legislation in Germany.²¹ The United States, as of yet, has not drafted such nightmarish legislation at the federal level – legislation that would have a direct, material effect on the wonderful, rag-tag family that I am part of. Nonetheless, here in the United States, Congress has gone to great lengths in attempts to ensure that gay and lesbian relationships do not have any legal recognition by passing the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996. Now that conservatives feel that DOMA is threatened by the Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas*, I do acknowledge unsettling knots in my stomach in response to scenarios that are all-too-easy to imagine in our current cultural climate – scenarios that would bring the kind of legislation enacted in France onto the floors of Congress for open debate.

In understanding both the similarities and the distinctions between the United States and France, it is important to understand why the question of children played such a central role in debates there. The child plays a central role in debates around gay marriage whenever psychoanalytic narratives are invoked because those narratives describe the development of the child as a socially recognizable subject, as a self. Those descriptions require a mother and a father. Sigmund Freud wrote in *Three Essays on Sexuality*:

Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis. With the progress of psycho-analytic studies the importance of the Oedipus

19. Fassin recounts the ways in which Lévi-Strauss was invoked by both the right and the left in Parliament ('Same Sex, Different Politics', p. 227). As he also notes, Agacinski's own marriage to the French Prime Minister had an impact on the terms of the political and intellectual debate.

20. Butler recounts an editorial Agacinski wrote in *Le Monde* explicitly referencing Butler's own scholarship as the precursor to the loss of the symbolic order that lets us know our own subjectivity. See Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', pp. 11-12.

21. Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', p. 22.

complex has became [sic] more and more clearly evident; its recognition... distinguishes the adherents of psycho-analysis from its opponents.²²

Oedipus, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari noted in *Anti-Oedipus*, requires a holy family of mommy, daddy, and child in order to tell the story of the process by which the child grows into a coherent subject, both interpersonally and socially.

And the tasks of socialization are the father's. The child's relationship to father in the Oedipal crisis creates the psychic space for the formation of the superego and inaugurates the child as a coherent social subject who has a *sexuality* (which is normatively heterosexual because in Oedipus the healthy child develops sexual desire for someone who can mirror the opposite-gendered parent) and a *gender* (the biological sex of the child matches in a one-to-one correspondence with the gender identity of the same sexed parent—biological males are *men* and biological females are *women*). Mommy and daddy's fixed, recognizable gender identities and heterosexuality are the necessary conditions for the entire process. The centrality of Oedipus still looms over certain portions of Western culture, whether in attempts to re-appropriate Freud in light of new clinical approaches (e.g. in the work of Julia Kristeva or Jacques Lacan) or in attempts to deconstruct Freudian Oedipal theory (e.g., in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*). Once anyone steps into psychoanalytic discourse, Oedipus is pervasive; once the country of France entered into that discourse to inform debates on same-sex relationships, it could not conceive how two women, two men, or any other queer combinations of parents could create a coherent, recognizable person as a subject.²³ Gay and lesbian families were very definitely queer families, marked by an unknowability that threatened an entire country. The avenues for the creation of those families had to be barricaded by specific legal prohibitions *even as* gay and lesbian relationships were recognized in France.

22. *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. VII. Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (ed. James Strachey; London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1956), p. 226.

23. Fassin demonstrates that in France, this concept of subjectivity was also invoked in debates about immigration. More important than being a recognizable social subject, one must be a legitimate French citizen. The same debates that limited the parenting options of gay and lesbian people also invoked the psychoanalytic discourse of subjectivity to define French citizenship on the basis of parental citizenship. The children of parents who were not French citizens could not themselves be formed properly as French citizens even if they were raised their entire lives in France because their parents could not psychically impart the symbolic structure of 'Frenchness' to them as they grew up. Psychoanalysis became a discourse particularly amenable to nationalism as well as homophobia.

America has not entered into that discourse yet, for at least two reasons. First, the dominant American forms of psychoanalysis—self psychology or object-relations theory, for example—are much more clinical and less mythic, leaving little room for the creation of the kinds of complex narratives employed in France; second, those same forms of psychoanalytic practice are not regularly paired with anthropological discourses in the way that structuralism informs both psychoanalytic practice (for example, in Lacanian practice) and anthropological theory in France. And yet, American gay families are not out of the woods—and we weren't even before the change in rhetoric following the Supreme Court decision. Not surprisingly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick alerted us to this back in 1993. In a wonderful, scathing essay entitled 'How to Bring your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys',²⁴ Sedgwick argues that the 1973 decision by the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its catalog of mental illness classification known as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* was not so much a removal as a displacement of identical clinical judgments into the diagnosis of gender identity disorder.

Sedgwick provides example after example of psychiatrists professing an enlightenment from the normative gender and sexuality assumptions inherent in Freud. Each of these men (and they are, indeed, all men) had published re-appraisals of homosexuality that they claimed had corrected the potential for abuse within the fields of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Sedgwick doesn't believe them for a moment, quoting their own words from case studies that equated a well-adjusted homosexual with a masculine male, a *real man*. The well-adjusted homosexuals included:

'Luke, a forty-five year-old career army officer...'; and Tim, who was 'burly, strong, and could work side by side with anyone at the most strenuous jobs': 'gregarious and likable,' 'an excellent athlete,' Tim was 'captain of [his high school] wrestling team and editor of the school newspaper'.²⁵

Sedgwick quotes one of the psychiatrists regarding his own theory: 'The distinction between [well-adjusted gay men] and [gay men] with psychopathology is usually clear enough during childhood. Extremely and chronically effeminate boys, for example, should be understood as falling into the latter category'.²⁶

24. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'How to Bring your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys', in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 154-64.

25. Sedgwick, 'How to Bring your Kids Up Gay', p. 155.

26. Sedgwick, 'How to Bring your Kids Up Gay', p. 156.

In this essay Sedgwick shows how psychiatry is attempting to create the developmental discourse for healthy gay men, an Oedipal narrative in masculine drag, as it were. A narrative that says healthy gay men are the ones who, during their childhood, adolescence and adulthood, are masculine and gender-typical. Sedgwick is pointing to the anxiety present in psychiatry to be on the lookout for unhealthy gay men (understood as those gay men who are effeminate). Given that all of the gay men studied by these psychiatrists were raised in presumably heterosexual families, is it such a leap of imagination to see how these same discourses, marked as they are by surveillance and suspicion of effeminate boys, would diagnose the children of gay or lesbian parents, much less the parents themselves? It would be a diagnosis of psychopathology.

Scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler have developed important critiques of psychoanalytic discourse. However, in America the language for claiming the primacy of marriage will come from religious discourses at least as much as from psychological discourses because Christian religious and theological discourse provides the foundation for mythic narratives of sexuality in America. While France may invoke structuralists such as Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss²⁷ in its national debate, psychoanalytic and anthropologic structuralism is unlikely to be invoked in the halls of the US Congress or in the pages of prominent newspapers. But religious language around marriage and the theological explanations that Christians invoke to support it are certain to be mobilized. Sedgwick and Butler have unmasked the hidden biases of psychiatric and psychoanalytic discourse. Queer theologians need to unmask the idolatrous self-justifications of much of the theological and ethical discourse of human sexuality in Christianity today. To do so requires turning the tables on the oft-repeated claim that gay and lesbian Christians are sinfully perverting the Christian tradition to justify their own selfish desires. The theological and ethical language produced from Protestant theologies such as those developed by Karl Barth claims that only the man and woman bound together in marriage could reflect God's full intention for human beings created in the image of God. Theological scholarship that uses the tools of genealogy and deconstruction often employed in queer theory discloses that the present-day theology and ethics of *heterosexual* marriage are both idolatrous and contradictory.

27. Such invocations, in the case of Lévi-Strauss, were made against his wishes. As I noted above, Fassin makes this point clear. Butler expounds on it as well. See Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', p. 42, n. 14.

Graham Ward summarizes Karl Barth's central claims about male/female complementarity in light of his Trinitarian theology and his sexual ethics laid out in *Church Dogmatics*. In his article 'The Erotics of Redemption',²⁸ Ward sees Barth's theological anthropology centering on a notion of difference: human beings experience the creation in light of a separation from God – a divinely ordered distance or difference. In our relations with other human beings, we must recognize and appreciate the difference of the other in order to experience a fuller human existence that is impossible when we look only within ourselves. In exploring this notion in the realm of human sexuality, Barth uses a number of metaphors, many of which are broader than a specific male-female complementarity. This, says Ward, is important:

The erasure of the specific biological difference issues, I would argue, from reading the relationship of the male and female from a theological (rather than a medical or sociological or anthropological) point of view. Where the true understanding of creation's ontological order comes from a participation in the operation of God's being, the biological...has no value.²⁹

Ward claims that Barth's argument about the nature of human beings in the image of God constantly points to the centrality of relationship as the work of the spirit to move us beyond sinful self-absorption. But Ward also claims that Barth constantly describes these relationships of complementarity in terms over and above the male and female. In short, Barth's argument is theological – as human beings we require relationship to another to move us beyond our sinful preoccupation with ourselves – not biological.

Having laid out this theological claim and providing numerous examples from Barth's writings to demonstrate the complexity and multiplicity of his descriptions of complementarity, Ward then claims that Barth's ethics are unfaithful to his theology:

It is a pity, then, that...having rejected...stereotyped roles for 'male' and 'female' and insisted that the divine command 'frees man and woman from the self-imposed compulsion of...systematisation', Barth then defines their ethical and social vocation in terms of their biology alone. It is as if he returns to a natural theology his whole theological system is set up to refute.³⁰

Barth's failure to maintain his theological insight in his ethical reflections is evidence of a particularly pernicious form of theological discourse, a discourse that labels as God-given Barth's own sexual desires.

28. Graham Ward, 'The Erotics of Redemption: After Karl Barth', *Theology & Sexuality* 8 (1998), pp. 52-72.

29. Ward, 'The Erotics of Redemption', pp. 61-62.

30. Ward, 'The Erotics of Redemption', p. 65.

This equation of a male-dominant heterosexuality with God's divine plan comes at the expense of women who take on a supportive role to the God-given power of the man. It comes at the expense of heterosexual human beings who never enter into the covenant of marriage and who therefore cannot experience God's design for the fullness of creation (this would include Jesus of Nazareth, many of the apostles, the majority of Roman Catholic clergy, and non-married heterosexual Christians). It comes at the expense of lesbians and gay men whose sexual lives not only fail to mirror God's design but who are deserving of a particular kind of scorn in Barth's thought:

Everything which points in the direction of male or female seclusion, or of religious or secular orders or communities, or of male or female segregation—if it is undertaken in principle and not consciously and temporarily as an emergency measure—is obviously disobedience. ... That such an attitude is all wrong is shown symptomatically in the fact that every artificially induced and maintained isolation of the sexes tends as such—usually very quickly and certainly morosely and blindly—to become philistine in the case of men and precious in that of women and in both cases more or less inhuman. It is well to pay heed even to the first steps in this direction.

These first steps may well be symptoms of the malady called homosexuality. This is the physical, psychological and social sickness of a phenomenon of perversion, decadence and decay, which can emerge when man refuses to admit the validity of the divine command in the sense in which we are now considering it. ... And since humanity as fellow-humanity is to be understood in its root as the togetherness of man and woman, as the root of this inhumanity there follows the idea of a masculinity free from woman and a femininity free from man. And because nature or the Creator of nature will not be trifled with, because the despised, fellow-man is still there, because the natural orientation on him is still in force, there follows the corrupt emotional and finally physical desire in which—in a sexual union which is not and cannot be genuine—man thinks that he must seek and can find in man, and woman in woman, a substitute for the despised partner. But there is no sense in reminding man of the command of God only when he is face to face with this ultimate consequence, or pointing to the fact of human disobedience only when this malady breaks out openly in these unnatural courses. Naturally the command of God is opposed to these courses. This is almost too obvious to need stating. It is to be hoped that, in awareness of God's command as also of His forgiving grace, the doctor, the pastor trained in psycho-therapy, and the legislator and judge—for the protection of threatened youth—will put forth their best efforts. But the decisive word of Christian ethics must consist in a warning against entering upon the whole way of life which can only end in the tragedy of concrete homosexuality.³¹

31. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (trans. A.T. Mackay *et al.*; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), III.4, pp. 165-66.

Karl Barth's sexual ethics is a marvelously malignant example of the ways in which a professed theology of sexual orthodoxy claims to be pointing to God's gift of sexuality contained in the mutuality of marriage when, in fact, it polices the bodies and lives of *any* Christian who does not enter into marriage. Once this disciplinary sexual discourse begins in Barth, it multiplies throughout his theology. Male/female complementarity is the *only* way to understand eros. Marriage is the supreme example of salvation: 'The economy of salvation worked out through history and ecclesiology is governed by the call and election to universal reconciliation that marriage announces'.³² Male/female complementarity is the *only* hermeneutic by which to read the Genesis creation narratives and the Song of Songs.³³ Marital mutuality is the *only* experience of humanity: ' "Only what takes place between such as these [the couple, the fellows, the helpmates] is humanity" '.³⁴

Karl Barth's theological claims about human sexuality become the only lens through which the normative picture of the human being created *imago dei* is seen. They provide a way to make theological, ethical, and biblical claims. There is only one problem. They are untrue. This is the case not because heterosexual marriage can never be an occasion for revelation into our theological and ethical lives, but because it can never be the *only* one. In order to articulate his theological claims, Barth has to shut the church doors to whole numbers of people. He has to place the embodied life of the Christ lived out in Jesus of Nazareth in a category of 'less-than'.³⁵ He has to limit the work of the Spirit in eros to the marital covenant. In psychological terms, Barth's theology of eros and complementarity is narcissistic, according to Ward:

Barth is not able to establish the sexual difference his theology requires. His male and female are not a couple. They are not a partnership. The desire in operation is...narcissistic. The woman has a function only within the economy of male desire wherein she functions as compliment, not difference.³⁶

Psychologically, the system is narcissistic; theologically it is idolatrous.

32. Ward, 'The Erotics of Redemption', p. 61, quoting Barth.

33. See, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.1, pp. 310-12.

34. Ward, 'The Erotics of Redemption', p. 62, quoting Barth.

35. Mark Jordan makes a similar case in regards to Anders Nygren's theology that Nygren spells out in *Agape and Eros*. In regard to a theology of eros, Nygren and Barth are mirrors to each other. See Mark Jordan, *Telling Truths in Church* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), pp. 95-96 and n. 19, p. 117.

36. Ward, 'The Erotics of Redemption', p. 67.

From an ethical standpoint, the irony is that Barth's own life failed to mirror his theological arguments. Despite developing a theology of love based on clear distinctions between eros and agape and naming marriage as the lone site for the ethical expression of erotic love, Barth carried on a decades-long relationship with his assistant Charlotte von Kirschbaum. In 1925, von Kirschbaum visited Barth for a month in Münster while his wife and children were still living in Göttingen. She spent a summer with Barth while he was on sabbatical in 1929 and a few months later in the fall of that year, Barth announced that she would be moving into the family's household. She stayed there until moving to a nursing home in 1964 due to illness. There is no way to know if Barth and von Kirschbaum were sexually intimate but Barth himself said he was in love with her.³⁷

From Barth's own theological and ethical system the question of sexual behavior is beside the point; Barth's dual relationships with Charlotte and his wife Nelly ran contrary to his own theological system *even if* he remained sexually faithful to Nelly because he placed his theological argument of complementarity in Scripture (notably the Genesis creation narrative) which can only be read as one man and one woman if one is using Barth's hermeneutic. Of course, if Barth had wanted to challenge the pervasive point of view that heterosexual marriage is the *only* possible way to understand God's ideal for human relationships then his decades-long *ménage à trois*³⁸ could have provided a context from which to do so. Instead, he opted to live out a relationship contrary to his own theological and ethical stance and, at the same time, to condemn others whose relationship also ran contrary to his view.

Marcella Althaus-Reid, a Latin American queer theologian, angrily points out Barth's hypocrisy for 'writing on the values of traditional family while he obviously could not suffer the occasionally idiotic nature of married life.'³⁹ The systematic theological system that Karl Barth created continues to hurt anyone who falls outside the bounds of holy

37. For further reading on Barth's relationship with von Kirschbaum, see Renate Kobler, *In the Shadow of Karl Barth: Charlotte von Kirschbaum* (trans. Keith Crim; Louisville: Westminster Press, 1989). See also Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998) as well as George Hunsinger's review of Selinger's book. Available from http://www.ptsem.edu/grow/barth/Selinger_review.htm (accessed 4 April 2005).

38. Graham Ward described Barth's relationship using this term when he described Barth's ethical description of male/female as narcissistic. See Ward, 'The Erotics of Redemption', p. 67.

39. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 49.

matrimony. Heterosexual marriage is the quintessential story that defines our subjectivity as sexual beings in America today. Whether we seek to preserve it or are pushing to have its benefits extended to us, we use it as a point of reference in thinking about intimate relationships. But we need other points as well so that other relationships can be seen, celebrated, supported. We also need other points of reference in order to illuminate the reality that too many people spin out a double, schizophrenic life of valorizing marital monogamy while living outside its boundaries.

In exploring all of these very complicated issues I have sought to trouble the seemingly self-evident claims of psychoanalytic and theological discourses. Queer scholars must continue to trouble these kinds of discourses. There needs to be an ongoing critical analysis as to why gay and lesbian couples would want to take on the structures of heterosexual marriages in our lives in the first place. There needs to be an analysis as to the mechanisms that trap gay and lesbian parents in conceptual spaces incapable of offering imaginative alternative family structures because we are so embedded in a culture that sees the heterosexual family as sacred. They will help to break apart the rock-solid discourses around marriage and family in order to provide some space for still unimagined counter-practices. Those analyses will be brilliant, bitchy, scathing and sharp as they explore the massive (and massively denied) contradictions in marriage in America today and expose pervasive lies passed off as profound truths.

And yet, conservative critics have brought children into this debate. We have moved into issues within this long-winded debate surrounding gay marriage in which the subjects discussed are not only adults with strongly held positions and passionate emotions; children reside within the space of this debate. The children of straight people, the children of gay people. My children. I realize that to bring this up risks the charge of sentimentality — playing the trump card of the innocent child that I myself have criticized in this very essay. So be it.

I have two sons, ages six and three. I want to protect them from discourses and from rhetoric that will hurt them. And I want to work to create the space in which their family is supported by the community they live in. If psychoanalysis tells us that one of the father's jobs is to inaugurate the child as a social subject, then I want to inaugurate my children into a culture that is less violent both in deeds and in words. Though there are many forms that violence can take, clearly one of the most dangerous for our family comes from the deep anxiety in American culture occasioned by non-normative gender and sexuality. Queer theorists also need to begin to find ways to look at the questions being raised

in this debate in a non-polemical rhetorical style. In the article by Judith Butler that I referenced earlier, I spot a glimpse of this kind of rhetoric:

What is the fantasy of homosexual love that the child unconsciously adopts in gay families? How do children who are displaced from original families or born through implantation or donor insemination understand their origins? What cultural narratives are at their disposal, and what particular interpretations do they give to these conditions? Must the story that the child tells, a story that will no doubt be subject to many retellings, about his or her origin conform to a single story about how the human comes into being? Or will we find the human emerging through narrative structures that are not reducible to one story, the story of a capitalized Culture itself? How must we revise our understanding of the need for a narrative understanding of self that a child may have which includes a consideration of how those narratives are revised and interrupted in time? And how do we begin to understand what forms of gender differentiation take place for the child when heterosexuality is not the presumption of Oedipalization?⁴⁰

Those are very real questions. The still-unknown answer to these questions is the very thing that Rick Santorum and Maggie Gallagher are afraid of. Moving beyond polemic and fear, however, might help us to imagine some answers, though any answers will necessarily be tentative, experimental and localized.

The theological system of Karl Barth and the less-nuanced arguments of contemporary American conservative defenders of heterosexual marriage who endlessly invoke Christian faith to make their points are, in effect, nothing more than a Christian conservative translation of the structuralist orthodoxy of Agacinski's symbolic order. All of these discourses limit themselves to heterosexual complementarity to tell us what it means to be fully human. All of them name the nuclear family as the sole site from which the child (either as a child of God or as a modern subject) can be raised rightly. Queer theorists have mounted vigorous critiques of the limitations of the structuralist arguments such as those Agacinski makes. Queer theologians could use the breadth of the Christian tradition that American conservatives claim to defend to challenge that same claim theologically.

The happily-ever-after ending to the story of heterosexuality is the nuclear family. Christians should stop and reflect on the centrality of the metaphor of family for informing our theologies and pastoral practices. And we must do so not only in light of the kinds of critiques raised by queer theorists in response to structuralist philosophers but because of these kinds of words from Scripture:

40. Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', pp. 38-39.

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple (Lk. 14.26).

How do we square the centrality of the family with the call of discipleship? That is the question that queer Christians should ask of Mr Santorum and Ms Gallagher. The metaphor of the nuclear family must be negated in order that the kinds of relationships we aspire to within it might be imagined in new ways. It must be negated in order that we might glimpse the ways that it eclipses the demands and graces of Christian community and Christian relationships already occurring in a broad array of patterns and constructions.

Christian Evangelicals, who are most often the staunchest advocates of traditional marriage and marriage amendments in America, claim that marriage must be protected not only because the heterosexual couple expresses God's design for human beings but also because marriage is the institution that provides a structure to bring up children as Christians. And yet, if orthodox Christian theologies of marriage all tend to support this first claim, those same theologies and the corresponding rituals occasioned by them do not clearly support the second claim. Rather, most orthodox theologies look, instead, to the Christian community as the site for creating the structure to bring up Christian children. Christian theologies and rituals of baptism, for example, remind us that the Christian community, not the nuclear family, is the institution that forms us as Christians. Even Christian traditions that practice believer's baptism profess that we are born again not as children of our mothers and fathers but as children of God. This is a tremendously important theological and ethical point for queer Christians to consider precisely because it is supported by orthodox theology. In other words, the various patterns of relationships blessed and named and celebrated and supported in progressive Christian communities are precisely the manifestation of the kind of community that can help form us as Christians. Those manifestations are by no means perfect and complete but by their very breadth they have much to teach the narrow impoverishment of the nuclear family as the only structure of relationship God blesses. When gay and lesbian parents bring their children to these kinds of progressive communities, they are broadening their family to participate in what they hope to be the broader family of God. It is this family, not the isolated nuclear family of mommy, daddy and child, that can teach us something about the fullness of God's work of redemption in the world.

I believe that certain churches can help provide some new narratives—some new, mythic alternatives to both Oedipus and to Barth—when they welcome queer people and queer families into the life of Christian

community. Those myths could be told by paying attention to the radical implications of some of our most common Christian rituals, rituals such as baptism. Those rituals stand in colorful contrast to the stark claim that it is only in the married heterosexual couple that can love and nurture a child. Alternatives to the religious discourses that have been mobilized in America to 'protect the sanctity of marriage' must illuminate both our theological thinking and our religious practices and rituals around marriage and around the rearing of children. As conservatives have doubled their discourses to support heterosexual marriage by condemning gay and lesbian relationships and by claiming to protect children, so too must queer responses multiply the sites from which to articulate critiques and offer alternatives. Those sites must include (at minimum) the academy, which can produce queer theological scholarship, and the Christian community, which can offer evidence of the continuing work of God among Christians who are bound together by various covenants not limited by the strict boundaries of an idolatrous, exclusionary heterosexuality.

My sons, their other dad, their two moms: we make up a family. And we have had to work very hard along the way. How is it that gay and lesbian parents – parents who have had to spend an inordinate amount of time preparing and planning and praying for kids, who have made thought-out conscious decisions about the kind of commitment being a parent requires, who constantly have to navigate the still very powerful institutions of this society simply to create enough safety for our children's daily living, who are engaged in these kinds of intentional, thoughtful, reflective processes – have come to be named as a primary danger to children and their (straight) families?

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