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A Christian Case for Gay Marriage?

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The mainline Protestant denominations continue to debate the question of homosexuality in extended and excruciatingly inconclusive controversy. In one sense, these liberal denominations are caught in a bind. Their members at the grassroots level, along with those pastors and church leaders who hold to orthodox doctrine and biblical concepts of sexuality, will not accept an embrace of same-sex marriage or the ordination of practicing homosexuals. A residue of biblical commitment prevents these denominations from an open embrace of what scripture so clearly condemns. On the other hand, the liberal elites in control of the seminaries, institutions, and bureaucracies of these denominations are generally committed to revisionist understandings of theology, sexuality, and church doctrine.

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Evidence of this approach continues to build, and the emergence of a new book, *What God Has Joined Together?: A Christian Case for Gay Marriage*, offers a summary of the arguments now common among the proponents of same-sex marriage.

Written by David G. Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni, *What God Has Joined Together?* is likely to incite considerable controversy. After all, Myers serves as the John Dirk Werkman Professor of Psychology at Hope College in Michigan—a school long associated with the Reformed Church in America. Scanzoni is one of the leaders within the Evangelical Ecumenical Women's Caucus and edits their newsletter. She is well known for writing one of the first books advocating the acceptance of homosexuality to a Christian audience.

The authors begin by asserting: "We believe in marriage. We want to see it strengthened. Knowing that strong, healthy, loving relationships are beneficial to the individuals involved and to any children they might have, we want to see couples flourish. We also believe that society, by supporting marriage, benefits as well."

So good, so far. Nevertheless, the authors reveal the lines of their argument very quickly. In what is identified as "A Personal Letter to Our Readers," the authors lament that "some who have yearned for such a public commitment have been denied it." They link historical opposition to marriage "for reasons of social class, race, or ethnicity" to the current debate over same-sex marriage. Note carefully how they pose today's most pressing issue: "The burning question in our day is whether persons of the same sex should be prevented from sealing their love commitment in socially recognized marriage." Before going further, consider that Myers and Scanzoni have already normalized a "love commitment" between same-sex couples and posed the question as if the burden is on orthodox Christians to argue that same-sex

couples should not be able to “seal” their commitment in “socially recognized marriage.”

“Voices have been raised to suggest that permitting persons of the same sex to marry will destroy the institution,” the authors acknowledge. “We think not. We believe that opening marriage for gay and lesbian people could actually strengthen the institution for all people.”

Accepting the feminist argument that the personal is the political, the authors reveal their own marital experience. Myers and his wife have been married for forty-one years and are the parents of three adult children. Scanzoni “experienced a painful midlife divorce after twenty-seven years of marriage and is the mother of two adult sons and the grandmother of three boys and two girls.” What binds these two together as authors? Myers and Scanzoni inform readers that “the two of us are kindred spirits as active Christians who care about compassion, love, and justice in the lives of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation.”

The basic worldview that now undergirds the argument for normalizing homosexuality is based in the assumption that homosexual behavior, in itself, is not sinful. Accepting the bizarre claims of revisionist Bible scholars, proponents claim that the crucial biblical texts condemning homosexuality actually condemn something other than “committed” same-sex relationships. The fact that a plain and direct reading of the scriptures would leave no room for same-sex marriage is dismissed as rooted in nothing more than the limited understanding of the biblical authors and the presumed “homophobia” of ancient cultures.

Myers and Scanzoni base their argument in psychology. They argue that human beings are characterized by a “longing for belonging” that has usually taken the shape of heterosexual marriage. “Mountains of data confirm that most people are happier attached,” the authors report. “The institution of marriage has traditionally offered the possibility of forming one of life’s deepest attachments. Social science research has shown that, compared with those who have never married, and especially those who have separated or divorced, married people report greater happiness and life satisfaction.” Thus, Myers and Scanzoni again appear to be advocates for the institution of marriage and the strengthening of marriage within the larger culture.

But they quickly shift to the issue of homosexual marriage. After recognizing the benefits that are common to heterosexual marriage, the authors argue: “Studies done before the advent of twenty-first century gay marriage reveal ‘striking similarities’ in the love and satisfaction experienced by same-sex couples and heterosexual couples.” Thus, Myers and Scanzoni base their argument in their psychological assumption that human beings need to form life-long commitments and in sociological analysis purported to establish parity between homosexual and heterosexual couplings.

And what exactly *is* marriage? The authors cite anthropologist George Murdoch to the effect that marriage is separated from other human relationships by two factors—economic interdependence and sexual interdependence. To this is added a “socially recognized contract” that is respected by the larger culture. Why, they ask, should same-sex relationships be excluded when such relationships can fulfill the first two purposes?

Accepting many of the arguments offered by those who propose a biological or environmental cause for sexual orientation, Myers and Scanzoni argue that “evidence points to brain differences and prenatal hormonal influences helping to explain sexual orientation.” They claim that “the consistency of the genetic, neural, and biochemical findings have swung the pendulum towards a greater appreciation of biological influences” in determining sexual orientation. They criticize ministries that attempt to change an individual’s sexual orientation by means of reparative therapy. They dismiss many of these ministries, and reject the testimonials of individuals who claim to have had their sexual orientation changed back to heterosexuality as “false, self-deceptive, or from people who never were genuinely homosexual.”

Noting that the word “homosexuality” is never used in scripture, Myers and Scanzoni argue: “Nothing is said about homosexual *orientation* as understood through modern science, nor is anything said about the loving relationship of two same-sex persons who have covenanted to be life partners.” Their conclusion: “It’s important to keep those distinctions in mind when examining the small number of biblical passages commonly used in discussions of homosexuality.” Referring to the key New Testament passages that condemn homosexuality, they claim that “many biblical scholars are convinced that these passages have nothing to do with homosexual *orientation* and committed homosexual relationships as we know them today.”

The authors then go on to make several claims about the biblical texts concerning homosexual behavior. First, they

argue that the Bible “has very little to say about same-sex sexual expression.” Rather than condemning homosexual behavior *per se*, they insist that these biblical passages actually condemn “idolatry, lust, promiscuity, and exploitation.” The bottom line: “Scripture does not speak to naturally disposed same-sex orientation, nor does it speak to loving, committed homosexual relationships.”

The full shape of the argument offered by Myers and Scanzoni appears in the final chapters of their book. They argue that the acceptance of same-sex marriage would reduce risky sexual behaviors among homosexuals and that acceptance of same-sex marriage is mandated by the Christian concern for justice. Arguing that marriage has been transformed over previous centuries, Myers and Scanzoni simply assert that the acceptance and normalization of same-sex relationships is the next stage in the evolution of marriage as an institution.

In the end, psychology trumps theology. In the epilogue that concludes the book, Myers and Scanzoni cite the authority of the American Psychological Association in asserting that the denial of marriage to same-sex couples “reinforces and perpetuates the stigma historically associated with homosexuality.” Thus, the psychological argument now common to our therapeutic culture takes precedence over the biblical condemnations of homosexual behavior. The biblical authors are corrected by the ideological constructs of modern psychology and the institution of marriage is transformed from its objective basis in creation to an evolutionary model rooted in social development.

“Today’s marriage war is a clash of those rightly concerned about marriage and the well-being of children, versus those eager to encourage committed bonds and associated rights for gays and lesbians. Might it be possible to say that *both* are right, and thus for conservatives to get their juice and liberals their peel?,” the authors ask. The answer to that question is a certain “no.” What Myers and Scanzoni propose is nothing less than full legal recognition of same-sex relationships as equal to heterosexual marriage. Those committed to a biblical concept of sexuality cannot accept same-sex marriage as a way of supposedly saving and preserving the institution for the future.

We owe Myers and Scanzoni this much—their book offers positive proof that what drives proponents of same-sex marriage is a psychological worldview that is directly at odds with the worldview of the Bible. For that reason alone, this book should be taken seriously.

