

Whose Side Are We on?

THE CATHOLIC THING

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Note: I've heard from many of you – far more even than I expected – that The Catholic Thing is the first thing you look at online every morning. (Me too, but for different reasons.) Lots of you also express a sense of urgency about knowing what's happening in the Church. Our staff and team of writers are committed to bringing you the very best news and analysis in the coming year. But we can only continue to do our jobs if you do your part. We've made great progress towards meeting our end-of-year target, but we still need many more of you to act. Lots of people complain about what's going on in the Church and the world. Here's a chance to do something. If you haven't already, please, right now, [make your tax-deductible online donation now](#) – no amount is too small, or too large – or if you prefer, write a check, to assure the future of The Catholic Thing – Robert Royal

If you approve of bank robbery, you won't be able to condemn the act of shoplifting candy bars from a convenience store. I mean, you won't be able to do this if you are to be logically consistent. If you approve of a greater evil, you can't logically condemn lesser evils of the same genus.

Likewise, if you approve of murder you cannot, if you wish to retain your reputation for logical consistency, condemn assault and battery. Again, if you are a Catholic who approves of adultery, you cannot very well condemn contraception and fornication.

But in the now famous (perhaps I should say notorious?) Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis seems to approve of what has hitherto been regarded by the Catholic Church as adultery. He asserts – or at least he certainly *seems* to assert – that in certain circumstances a divorced-and-

remarried Catholic should be allowed to consider his/her second marriage a true marriage. In other words, this divorced and remarried Catholic should be free to have sinless sexual relations with his/her spouse and should be free to receive Communion.

This appears to contradict the plain words of Jesus himself, who said (unless the Gospels misreport him) that a married person who marries again while his/her first spouse is living commits adultery. Pope Francis, then, appears to be condoning in certain circumstances what Jesus himself calls adultery. And if the pope does this, how can he then not also condone (in certain circumstances) contraception and fornication?

In short, doesn't the pope's blessing of adultery in certain circumstances imply the collapse of almost the entire structure of Catholic sexual morality? Apart from rape and child molestation, what sexual taboos would remain? And won't the priest or ex-priest who molested boys be able to argue that that kind of thing is allowable "in certain circumstances"?

As for homosexual sodomy, the question of whether or not to condemn it would depend on whether it is more or less of a sin than adultery. If less, then the pope's permission of adultery in certain circumstances would also apply to homosexual behavior in certain circumstances. If more, then I suppose Catholics could still condemn homosexual conduct. But in reality, how could they do this if the whole structure of Catholic sexual morality had collapsed? If adultery and fornication deserve approval, who except a genuine homophobe would have the heart to disapprove of homosexual sodomy?

You could still condemn abortion. For abortion, being homicide, is a worse sin than adultery. In the real world, however, everybody who approves of sexual freedom also approves of adultery. Catholics, beginning with popes and bishops, could still condemn abortion, but their hearts wouldn't be in it.

De facto, they would approve of it.

A defender of Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia* might respond to what I have just said by pointing out that the pope is urging us to tolerate second marriages only in very rare and very narrow circumstances. He does not intend to open the door to the current secular ideal of nearly limitless sexual freedom. True enough. Likewise, the people who didn't repair the leak in the dike didn't intend to have the dike collapse and the land behind the dike

flooded by seawater. After all, it was such a big dike and such a small leak. What harm could be done?

Human beings, and I include Catholics in that category, are rational animals. This doesn't mean we are infallible; it doesn't even mean that we are very smart. But we tend to be consistent, at least in the long run. Once we adopt the principle, for instance, that "all men are created equal," it will sooner or later dawn on us that we'll have to get rid of slavery. Likewise, once Catholics agree with the pope that Jesus was in error when he expressed his absolutist views about the indissolubility of marriage, the whole structure of Catholic sexual morality will sooner or later collapse.

And not just sexual morality. The whole structure of Catholicism will collapse. For if Jesus, who (we should remember) was no minor authority figure in the history of the Church, was wrong about marriage, who knows how many other things he was wrong about? And if Jesus was wrong, it is likely St. Paul and other New Testament writers were wrong. And if Jesus and Paul were wrong, who can be confident in the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church? One small leak in the dike.

Now I don't write all this as an ultra-conservative. Not at all. If I were able to write the Church's law regarding marriage and sex, I'd allow everybody at least one divorce; for good people often make big mistakes, especially when young. And I'd have a tolerant attitude toward fornication and unmarried cohabitation, and I'd be only mildly censorious toward an occasional adultery. And if, nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus had asked my advice, I would have recommended that he adopt my views, inspired as they are by the great moral wisdom of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

For better or worse, however, the Catholic Church is not founded on the wisdom of the very enlightened and progressive present day. It is founded instead on what seems to a truly modern mind to be the provincial "wisdom" of an itinerant Palestinian preacher of the first century – a preacher we Catholics believe to be the all-perfect God incarnate. At least we say we believe this. If we really believe it, and if a disagreement opens up between Jesus and the pope on the question of the indissolubility of marriage, then, much though it grieves us to separate ourselves from such a good man as Pope Francis, we have no choice but to take the side of Jesus in this dispute. If we don't, the dike will collapse.

Without God, what principle secures justice for all?

The 'logical myopia' in today's thinking about same-sex 'marriage'

By [Alan Keyes](#)

There are times when it is critically important to reason according to principle. Why? So that we can appreciate the relationship between one object, event, or circumstance, and another. It is rather like family relations. Sites like [ancestry.com](#) have become increasingly popular because people see an advantage or benefit to be gained by increasing their awareness of kinship relations that go unnoticed until we begin tracing our roots back to their origin.

This awareness of principle in a concrete sense has its counterpart of course in logic and reasoning. Indeed, the whole point of the scientific method is to find the common factor that must logically be at work in what can at first appear to be unrelated events. The notion that *human behavior* can properly be understood simply by following the methods of materialistic empirical science is questionable. But the logic that requires us to group events in terms of some common progenitive cause is common to the search for knowledge about human as well as non-human things. But because the activity of human beings may be subject to immaterial as well as material causes, people often lose sight of this common logic as they deal with social and political issues.

Is this logical myopia at work today when it comes to dealing with the issues of abortion and so-called "marriage" for homosexuals? Many people who rejoice in some politician's strong stand against the destruction of nascent human life often overlook or even support that same individual's promotion of so-called homosexual "marriage." Apparently, it does not occur to them to consider the common premise that is at stake in both issues. Abortion involves the physical suppression of nascent human offspring. The acceptance of homosexual marriage involves eliminating procreation and child-rearing from the assumed definition of marriage as a social institution. This latter conceptual alteration removes the child from consideration as an expression of the final cause of the marital union. The former material alteration eliminates the child as a consequential expression of that union, in physical terms.

These alterations affect the moral substance of the institution of marriage. When the child is included in that institution as a conceptual and material fact, the institution serves the cause of humanity itself. It therefore affects the common good of human society as a whole, in accordance with a moral imperative that transcends not only individual interests, but the particular interest of any given human community. It encompasses the interests of the species as a whole. In this respect, the procreative

understanding of marriage accords with the comprehensive understanding human justice demands, so that, in serving individuals, we preserve the community as a whole.

If properly applied, this comprehensive understanding of the marriage institution has a practical effect. It implies that the institutional aim is not just to care for and satisfy the material and emotional needs of the *individuals* who comprise a family. It is to do so with respect for what is owed to *humanity* itself. This means not only leading parents to deal humanely with their children, but raising children to be humane in their dealings with other individuals, and in their sense of respect and responsibility toward the human community which they and the others comprise.

Understood from this perspective, the issue of marriage cannot be treated simply as a matter of individual concern and self-gratification. It is not just about "individuals who love each other." It's about individuals who love each other for the sake of giving what amounts to lifelong service (thinking of both their own lives and that of their children) to the common good of humanity as a whole.

I can well understand how people who deny the existence of any authoritative natural bonds between one human being and another are comfortable with the idea of marriage as an individually self-gratifying institution. But these days, people who profess to believe that marriage is an institution that antedates human governments and even human society itself are *also* acting as if marriage does not owe its institutional existence and authority to the creator, God, whom they recognize to be the author and ruler of all creation. For example, there is the deepening controversy among Roman Catholics in regard to Pope Francis' apparent endorsement of an approach that seems to give priority, in the pastoral care of married couples, to the subjective feelings and intentions of individuals, rather than God's objective provisions for humanity. [This is already being espoused by one Roman Catholic bishop](#) as the basis for pastors in his diocese to extend communion to openly adulterous couples, and a warm welcome to what he called "LGBT families."

This can be mistaken for a purely religious or denominational issue until we face its implication: The existence and nature of government's interest in what is now asserted to be a humanly fabricated institution can no longer be taken for granted. This is particularly true when it comes to defining and enforcing parental obligations, or assuring government's respect for parental prerogatives that were justly understood to be a consequence of their conscientious efforts to fulfill these obligations. Particularly in the United States, this has always been a challenging subject. According to the understanding that has, until lately, informed our political institutions, marriage involves natural and unalienable individual rights that human governments are instituted (and therefore obliged) to respect.

But if the political definition of marriage from now on sees marriage as little more than a contract between individuals, with no authoritative basis but their own will

and passion, what authority do individual parents have when confronted with a government acting for the authority of the whole society? The advocates of so-called "marriage" for homosexuals cast their position in terms of freedom and individual rights. But by severing the institution of marriage from its root in "the laws of Nature and of Nature's God" (as the American Declaration of Independence put it), their logic cuts individuals off from sure access to what were, heretofore, their prerogatives over their family's life.

Those prerogatives existed as a matter of God-endowed right. They were not to be challenged unless and until government could assert and prove that parents had somehow failed to acquit their natural obligations. But as things now stand, Americans face the likelihood that, in the future, *parents will have no say over their children's lives that cannot be trumped by government power. Yet, if no source of justice imposes constraint upon their will and passion, except what human government admits*, and, for example, human governments admit *no constraint upon abortion*, what ground of principle is left for opposing that travesty?

Like the opposition to slavery in the 19th century, and the 20th century civil rights movement, the pro-life movement in the United States depends on the view that humanity involves justice, *God endowed* – justice both individuals and governments are obliged to respect. But where there is no effective appeal for justice except to human will and power, what then? In what is still an age of atrocity, who seriously believes that nascent humans will be the only people this endangers?

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