

# What is Marriage?

Based, in part, on the book by Girgis, Anderson, and George  
of the same name.

# What is *not* marriage?

- Can't know if something is wrong, unless we have some idea that there is a right way.
- There is a particular thing which we call *marriage*, which has logical boundaries and specific purposes and virtues.
- It cannot be said that *marriage* can meaningfully be used about any other relationship without doing damage to the meaning of the word - and thereby, institution of – *marriage*.

# Why have the discussion?

- As Christians, we understand this discussion to be one that relates to cosmic, universally moral matters.
- How such matters are understood within societies makes a difference (common grace).
- No social unit is more essential to any society, whether it is largely based on Christian ethical assumptions or not.
- Civically enforced ideas affect the sentiment of the public, that is, laws affect how people understand and feel about a particular matter.

“Marriage” either means something or it doesn’t.

- One man and one woman make one child.
  - This gives a preference to this particular relationship no matter if one is a materialistic atheist or deeply faithful, bible-believing Christian. This is the relationship we have been given, without which, we go extinct.
- Children fare best, by far, in stable households.
- Why civically stabilize or legislatively codify other relationships?

“Marriage” either means something or it doesn’t.

- It is not only about children, though that provides the only objective boundary for the notion of marriage.
- Marriage is not only a friendship, though it certainly has friendship as an aspect.
- Marriage is not only about sex, though that has always been a necessary component of marriage.

“Marriage” either means something or it doesn’t.

- Marriage is not only about sharing resources, though that must happen to engender mutual trust and interdependency that is present in the best marriages.
- Marriage is not only about children, but we rightly view it as a normative and objectively good feature of marriage.
  - *There is no reason that the institution would have come to pass without the logical result being children, more often than not.*

# “Marriage” either means something or it doesn’t.

- “There is a distinct form of personal union and corresponding way of life, historically called marriage, whose basic features do not depend on the preferences of individuals or cultures. Marriage is, of its essence, a comprehensive union: a union of will (by consent) and body (by sexual union); inherently ordered to procreation and thus the broad sharing of family life; and calling for permanent and exclusive commitment, whatever the spouses’ preferences. It is a personal and social reality...but it is also a moral reality: a human good with an objective structures, which is inherently good for us to live out.”<sup>1</sup>

• <sup>1</sup> Girgis, Anderson, George, *What is Marriage*, (Encounter Books: New York, 2012) 6.

# “Marriage” either means something or it doesn’t.

- To officially recognize something other than this as marriage is to change the meaning of the word and how the public understands the word.
  - This affects
    - Children
    - Stability of social groups.
    - Stability of individual and group resources.
    - Needs within society.
- It is not about one person or another being able to do what they want to do.



# “Equal Rights”

- How do we understand this?
- If anyone can have the right to marry as they see fit, then what is the distinction inherent in the word itself?
- If some moral boundaries are to be applied by revisionists in determining what “marriage”, how substantial are these boundaries
  - If objective boundaries such as biology and proliferative tradition can be ignored for the purpose of “equal rights”, then why can’t the subsequent, neo-boundaries?

# Anti-Miscegenation and Equal Rights

- Laws against marriage between people of different colors or “races”.
- These laws did not deny that a comprehensive union between “races” was possible, but, *in fact*, they sought to *prevent* that comprehensive union and the genetic “mixing” of “races”.
- The current debate is about *what marriage is, not* about who can participate in a traditional, conjugal union.

# Anti-Miscegenation and Equal Rights

- The *new* notions of “marriage” would change the *meaning*.
- “Consummation” of the marriage necessitously involved the conjugal act, and has so in every civilization in recorded history.
- This has nothing to do with “anti-gay” anything, but, in fact, is understood in light of the form and function of the human body and the only mode of success of the human species.

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# Anti-Miscegenation and Equal Rights

- Is all discrimination unjust?
- Do laws make distinctions?
- Do marriage revisionists purport to have no distinctions?
- If they do make distinctions –
  - On what basis?
  - How is that basis not unjustly discriminatory?
- What is marriage?

# The state interest in the matter

- The state has an interest in regulating some relationships.
  - Implicit in anyone arguing for marriage “equality”.
  - Would we choose to regulate friendships?
  - What distinguishes the revised version of marriage from normal friendships?
  - On what basis would one exclude friendships who wanted to be declared “married” from the institution? Isn’t this a denial of “equal rights” as put forth by the revisionists?
- “Ordinary friendships do not affect the common good in structured ways that could justify legal regulation.”<sup>2</sup>

## The state interest in the matter

- Would the state have an interest in codifying relationships that are emotional or sexual in nature?
- What is lost when an emotional bond is broken? Is anything apart from the emotions of those directly involved affected? If two people have chosen to share items in being roommates, doesn't a court system already exist to adjudicate such matters?

## *Get the government out of marriage*

### - Does the libertarian argument hold up?

- Marriage is primarily an act that reflects God's nature and God's design.
- It is a common grace – it is an objective good even outside of a Christian faith.
  - Children only come from the conjugal act between one man and one woman.
  - Children are most likely to become self-regulating citizens if they are raised in a stable environment.
    - *Why stabilize any other relationship?*



# *Get the government out of marriage*

## - Does the libertarian argument hold up?

- How would it be handled?
  - Local courts or magistrates?
  - Churches?
  - Independent, authorized persons?
- What body would arbitrate between these individual entities?
- If an agreement happened with one church, and then one of the parties decides to dissolve the agreement with another church, who has the authority to arbitrate or make a ruling?

# The state interest in the matter

- The third party value in a stable contract.
- All the more so with something as transgenerational and sociological as marriage.
- “If something would serve an important good, if people have a right to it, if private groups cannot secure it well, everyone suffers if it is lost, and the state can secure it without undue cost, then the state may step it – and should.”<sup>3</sup>

• <sup>3</sup> Girgis, Anderson, George, *What is Marriage*, (Encounter Books: New York, 2012) 41.

# Natural Law and sexuality

- As marriage is a comprehensive union, so the heterosexual act emphasizes this.
- Positively, there is a unique good that results from the bearing of children, a unique good desired by those who are not of a sexual orientation in which this can come to pass.
- Negatively, there is an emotional distinction between hurting one's property and one's body. The more intimate the damage, the more permanent the effects.

# Natural Law and sexuality

- The heterosexual act is a unique good because it is comprehensive and the result of it coming to fruition is a lifelong result: children.
- Even if the result is not children, the act itself is differentiated from any other sexual act because it coordinates the function and desire of the human body in a manner that is without parallel.
- “This is a function that neither can perform on their own...it is the coordination toward a single end that makes the union...achieving the end would deepen the union, but is not necessary for it.”<sup>3</sup>

• <sup>3</sup> Girgis, Anderson, George, *What is Marriage*, (Encounter Books: New York, 2012) 26.

# Natural Law and Sexuality

- “Two men, two women, and larger groups cannot achieve organic bodily union: there is no bodily good or function toward which their bodies can coordinate.”<sup>4</sup>
- “Pleasure – as a means to deeper attachment – cannot play this role for several reasons. The good must be truly common and for the couple as a whole, but mental states are private and benefit partners, if at all, only *individually*...while pleasure deepens and enriches a marital union, [it] cannot be its foundation. [It] cannot stand on its own.”<sup>5</sup>

• 4 Girgis, Anderson, George, *What is Marriage*, (Encounter Books: New York, 2012) 27.

• 5, *ibid.*

# Natural Law and sexuality

- Raising children does not confer this difference, either.
- It is the unique act, *and* the logical, potential, necessary result of the act (children) which are present in only one setting.
- This is why, as we have already seen, throughout all of history the conjugal act has been that which “consummates” the marriage, even if a man and a woman have already been betrothed or exchanged vows.

# Natural Law and sexuality

- “Marriage is a socially arranged solution for the problem of getting people to stay together and care for children that the mere desire for children, and the sex that makes children possible, does not solve.”<sup>6</sup>
- This is demonstrably *purposeful* on God’s part.
- Next week – The biblical case for traditional marriage, and how it remarkably coincides with our observations and experience.

• 6 James Q. Wilson, as quoted by Girgis, Anderson, and George, *What is Marriage?*, 39.