

Making a mockery of Marriage

Two books explain how it happened and what we can still do

review article by Johan D. Tangelder.

What is really at stake in the same-sex marriage debate? Shouldn't any two people who love each other be allowed to commit to one another? What is wrong with letting homosexuals marry?

The argument over gay marriage is only incidentally and secondarily an argument over gays. It is first and fundamentally an argument over marriage. Either we win this debate... or we lose the central meaning of marriage. If we cannot explain why unisex marriage is, in itself, a disaster, we have already lost the marriage ideal.

James Dobson, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family, calls the same-sex marriage issue a battle for the very soul of America. He argues that the institution of marriage represents the very foundation of social order. Everything of value sits on that base. Institutions, governments, religious fervor, and the welfare of children are all dependent on its stability. Marriage, when it functions as intended, is good for everyone, for the community, for the nation, and for the world. Marriage is the means by which the human race is propagated, and the means by which spiritual teaching is passed down through the generations. God intended that as a result of the loving union of the one-man, one-woman relationship, children would be born into an atmosphere of security, where both genders model teamwork and commitment.

Erwin W. Lutzer, senior pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, claims that in the United States they are on the verge of destruction of marriage as we know it. This redefinition of marriage would impact the kind of future we leave for our children and grandchildren. Enormous implications are at stake for America.

The pressure to affirm same-sex marriage is relentless. We hear it from the media, from some politicians and from gays themselves. They say, "We are also human beings with sexual desires; it would be unfair for some people to express those desires while others are forbidden to do so." Conservative MP Belinda Stronach, who campaigned for the leadership of that Canadian party, even declared that, "same-sex marriage is a human right."

Social trends

The same-sex marriage debate does not come out of the blue. In their two books Dobson and Lutzer describe social trends through the past decades that have set the stage for what is happening today. They describe the impact of feminism, no-fault divorce, the growth of cohabitation, and they show how the welfare system rendered millions of men superfluous.

The story begins in the 1960s with that failed social experiment: the Sexual Revolution. The invention of the birth control pill along with the general loosening of societal mores and the insistence on "rights" in various spheres, spawned a revolution in sexual attitudes. Sexual expression became perceived as a right – something to be expressed publicly, frequently, and outside of monogamous, lifelong marriage. With the

onslaught of pornography, the Playboy philosophy steadily shifted the centre of gravity from marital faithfulness to personal enjoyment.

Today the shift continues as sitcoms, movies, and documentaries make the practice of homosexuality seem normal. Promoting the gay agenda is high on the list of priorities for those who bring us the news and entertainment. Tolerance has emerged as the one indisputable national value. This word, which at one time meant that people should be free to *believe* whatever they wished, now meant that they could *do* whatever they wished, and it was improper to judge their conduct. In fact, the word tolerance now means that one must endorse homosexual behavior.

The Church

The church hasn't countered these moral shifts as effectively as it should have. Lutzer observes that in many ways radical homosexuals have tried to silence the church. One way is by publishing statements made by "moderate" church leaders who speak favorably of the gay agenda. This is intended to raise questions in the minds of those who take the Bible as God's Word and therefore see homosexuality as an unnatural act. The Episcopal Church, contrary to its own rules, has ordained an openly gay bishop. He was previously married to a woman whom he divorced to live with a man in an unmarried relationship. Lutzer comments that if a divorced man were to live with a woman to whom he was not married, even the most liberal church leaders would probably demur. He says that as we have learned, special exceptions are often made for homosexuals because of the perceived prejudice against them. "All this is done under the banner of *love*, which supposedly cancels all of the Scripture that condemns the homosexual lifestyle."

I could add that the United Church of Canada was granted the right to intervene in the Supreme Court of Canada hearing on same-sex marriage. In its request to appear, the United Church argued that, as one of only three Christian churches that perform same-sex marriages, it had a direct interest in the issues being raised. It said the United Church offered "philosophical, religious, social, theological and moral arguments that support equal marriage for people regardless of sexual orientation." Some in the Anglican Church have also jumped on the so-called progressive bandwagon. The late archbishop Ted Scott spoke out in favor of gay and lesbian rights, including the right to be married and ordained. Bishop Michael Ingham in British Columbia opposes an Anglican Church commission's request that bishops cease from divisive actions such as blessing gay unions and electing gay bishops. He said that he will continue to allow same-sex blessings in the diocese of New Westminster until his synod, or decision making body, meets in May 2005 and decides what course to follow.

Public Schools

The authors also point to the public education system as a source of indoctrination for the homosexual agenda of children and future generations.

Lutzer notes that in 2001 the National Educational Association adopted resolutions to promote the full-scale indoctrination of children to accept and affirm homosexual behavior. He says that no dissenting views are allowed; parents are silenced and children encouraged to experiment with various forms of sexual behavior. He states

that the San Francisco Unified School District has a lesson plan for teaching kindergarteners and first graders about homosexuality. It defines a family as a "unit of two or more persons, related either by birth or by choice, who may or may not live together, who try to meet each other's needs and share common goals and interests." Dobson rightly asked, "At what point will we be willing to defend what we believe? Will parents object if their children are routinely indoctrinated in homosexual ideology or occultism in the public schools?"

Judicial Activism

In their quest to legalize same-sex gay "marriage," gay activists have also turned to the courts. While Dobson and Lutzer both agree that judicial activism is rampant in the States they should have noted how much further advanced it is in Canada. In both countries gays and lesbians have steadily won court cases giving them rights similar to spouses. Judges don't seem to show any interest in what the destructive consequences their decisions will be for our families and society at large.

Many Canadians have expressed discomfort with the idea that judges are changing our society without the safeguards of public accountability provided by the democratic process. Some of the changes have been startling. For example, in ordering gay marriage on June 10, 2003, the highest court in Ontario, Canada, explicitly endorsed (invented!) a brand new vision of marriage. "Marriage is, without dispute, one of the most significant forms of personal relationships...Through the institution of marriage, individuals can publicly express their love and commitment to each other. Through this institution, society publicly recognizes expressions of love and commitment between individuals, granting them respect and legitimacy as a couple." This endorsement of gay marriage is a no-brainer. It views marriage merely as individuals' expressive conduct.

Polygamy

The same-sex marriage agenda has adverse consequences for both society and church. Gay marriage is the slippery slope to polygamy. Dobson asks: "If it is fair for two men or two women to marry, then why not three or five or seventeen? The terms *husband* and *wife* and *mother* and *father* would become merely words with no meaning. Parenthood could consist of any number of emotionally attached people who care for a child." The authors believe that once it is established that two men have the right to marry, it will be impossible to deny the same right to others. If marriage can be redefined as any two men or two men in love, what rational principle precludes extending that logic to polygamy - or any other combination of emotionally attached men, women, or children? If emotional attachment is the only standard by which we judge fitness to marry, then no sexual arrangement is off the table.

Lutzer agrees. If marriage is no longer the union of one man and one woman but rather any two persons who want to cohabit, who is to say that it must be limited to two people? Why not one man with two wives or ten? After all, we must extend "equal rights" to all individuals to live according to any arrangement they wish. The end result is the destruction of marriage as we know it – with children the losers. The authors' concern is justified. For example, in the summer of 2004 *Le Monde* leaked a government report

revealing that polygamy was routinely practiced in Muslim ghettos in France.

Loss of Freedom

The legalization of same-sex marriage will jeopardize freedom of religion. It will signify the end of the State being devoted to upholding and enforcing Christian values. Lutzer calls the Canadian experience instructive. In Canada one cannot speak against homosexuality in the media: heavy fines are levied if one says that homosexuality is a sin. A lesbian attorney correctly said that the real battle is between gay rights and religious freedom; freedom of religion, she said, will have to give way to the homosexual agenda. Lutzer notes that the radical homosexual movement which preaches tolerance will not itself tolerate alternate opinions. Everyone must move in lockstep with their agenda – or pay a price. Lutzer comments: "We can hear it already; 'All people have a constitutional right to marriage, in whatever gender arrangement they desire; the church, therefore, is breaking the law in denying people their constitutionally guaranteed rights.'" Dobson correctly argues that religious freedom in Canada is dying. On April 28, 2004, Parliament passed Bill C-250, which effectively criminalized speech or writings that criticize homosexuality. Focus on the Family has had programs taken off the air in Canada because they were deemed "hate speech." The authors could also have called attention to the Toronto District School Board, which has a human rights policy in place to prevent teachers from showing any preference for one family form or another. As new "gay friendly" policies are being developed, there is no accommodation for students that might have religious objections to a gay based-curriculum or sexual orientation drama.

Discrimination against Christians

We might as well get used to it. Opponents to same-sex marriage will get labeled alarmists, reactionaries, bigots, or "wacky fundamentalists," who belong to the "radical right." They are already painted as intolerant, homophobic, and hateful. Christian bashing has become routine in the secular media. The "mainstream" media continue to demonstrate astonishing bias against orthodox believers - bias that would not be tolerated against gays themselves. Dobson comments, "If you have the temerity to confront the homosexual juggernaut, someone will attack your integrity."

The authors could have mentioned that Canadian journalists seem to lead the way in Christian bashing. For example, *Toronto Star* columnist Michele Landsberg wrote a column back in June 2001 arguing that evangelical views on homosexuality "create the kind of parents who teach their children to hate and taunt their schoolmates who are children of lesbians or gay men."

Possibility of Change

Both Dobson and Lutzer argue that homosexual and lesbians can change. They offer a message of hope. Lutzer says, "I suspect that not many have left the gay lifestyle because they have heard a message condemning homosexuality. But many have left because of a message of hope, grace, and patience." Christians are to be agents of grace, mercy and forgiveness in a harsh and cruel world. Focus on the Family promotes the truth

that homosexuality is preventable and treatable - a message routinely silenced today. Dobson notes, "Overcoming homosexuality is incredibly difficult, and I will not minimize the anguish that can accompany the hurts and needs that surround it. Nevertheless, change does happen. We know of thousands of former homosexuals who have escaped from the lifestyle."

Lutzer refers to Exodus International, the largest evangelical Christian outreach to those affected by homosexuality. He invites homosexuals to come to Christ. "Come to Jesus as a homosexual, as a heterosexual, as a thief, but come." And he adds, " We come to Jesus as we are, but as someone has said, He loves us too much to leave us that way."

What we can do

Many argue that Christians should support the concept of "Civil unions" for same-sex couples. But both authors agree that this is not a proper response. It will confer on any future multiple-spouse combinations exactly the same privileges previously enjoyed by the legitimately married. Ron Crews of the Massachusetts Family Institute rightly said, "[The issue of] civil unions is merely marriage by another name and devalues the institution of marriage."

Since the publication of the books political developments in the United States have favored the pro-family agenda. On November 2 voters in 11 states approved constitutional amendments that reiterated that marriage was between one man and one woman. "[This] vote reveals once again the broad support for protecting marriage among the American people," Family Research Council president Tony Perkins said. Dobson urges Americans to support a federal constitutional amendment. He believes that to let states define what is and is not a marriage will mean fifty different definitions. That would create utter chaos. "Can you imagine a couple being legally married in Texas and not in Connecticut? Furthermore, the Supreme Court will override whatever the states do anyway, just as it did with regards to abortion in 1973." He is convinced that the Federal Marriage Amendment represents perhaps the last opportunity to ensure that traditional marriage is legally protected. He believes that it will ensure that the constitutional status of marriage is determined by the American people and their representatives, and not by unelected judges.

In opposing same-sex marriage we must speak truth in love. Dobson says, "As Christians, we must never do anything to cause hurt and rejection, *especially* to those with whom we disagree emphatically. We certainly cannot introduce homosexuals to Jesus Christ if we are calling them names and driving them away." Lutzer says that first and foremost his book aims at *redemption*, not rancor. He notes that we must lower our voices in this debate, speaking with respect and dignity. No matter how strongly we oppose the homosexual agenda, we are first of all called to be Christians who have the privilege of representing Christ to all the communities of the world, regardless of class, color, nationality or "gender orientation." We should write letters to editors, contact members of parliament, but our first and best defense is to model healthy marriages and families for all the world to see. And prayer is coveted during this time of intense debate. The battle belongs to the Lord. The church must speak out. We can't shirk our duty. We cannot retreat into a Christian subculture.

These two slender books by Dobson and Lutzer should be in the home of every Christian family and in church libraries. The authors urge us to turn to God as families, churches, and as individuals. They plead with us to resist the pressure to accept the arguments made for same-sex marriages heard daily on television and read in the newspapers. We must carefully expose the disinformation that has become so much a part of this debate. In fact, we as a church must become involved in the struggle to keep marriage according to God's intended program. If we cannot stand and defend the institution of marriage, then face it: The marriage debate is over.