Incriminating the Bride of Christ: Assessing from a Balthasarian Perspective The Ecclesiological Impact of Redefining Marriage

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Daniel Avila, THEO 526 Ecclesiology, Dr. Adam DeVille, Masters Program in Theology, University of St. Francis, Spring 2014

By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible.

Hebrews 11:3

Class projects owe their genesis to a potentially wide variety of experiences. When thinking about what topic to research for a paper in Ecclesiology, I discovered early in our assigned reading that Hans Urs von Balthasar had “use[d] gender difference to discuss the priesthood and the church’s relation to Christ, prompting much negative criticism.”\(^1\) While intriguing, this reference failed initially to cause me to overcome my hesitation. Much of my reflection in the past few years has focused on the definition of marriage and the institutional importance of sexual difference. Perhaps it was time for me to move on to addressing other issues.

But then Pope Francis gave a shout out to Balthasar in an interview, commending the theologian’s insights on the Church’s “Marian” profile.\(^2\) Other incidents soon followed, collectively convincing me to peer once again into the mystery of marriage, this time from the perspective of ecclesiology.


\(^2\) “It is true that women can and must be more present in the places of decision-making in the Church. But this I would call a promotion of the functional sort. Only in this way you don’t get very far. We must rather think that the Church has a feminine article : ‘La’. She is feminine in her origin. The great theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar worked a lot on this theme: the Marian principle guides the Church aside the Petrine. The Virgin Mary is more important than any bishop and any apostle.” “Transcript: Pope Francis’ March 5 Interview with Corriere della Sera,” CatholicNewsAgency.com, accessed March 24, 2014, [http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/transcript-pope-francis-march-5-interview-with-corriere-della-sera/](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/transcript-pope-francis-march-5-interview-with-corriere-della-sera/).
A Facebook friend provided an online link to a video story about a Christian florist in Washington state who is in legal trouble, charged with violating anti-discrimination mandates, because she declined to provide flowers for a long-time customer’s same-sex wedding ceremony. Her attorney emphasized in the video that the refusal was an extenuation of the florist’s acceptance of the sacred belief that the Church is the Bride of Christ.³

When I shared on my own Facebook page this video link, approving the florist, another friend who favors redefining marriage posted in reply a link to a just-published opinion piece in the National Catholic Reporter taking a radically different view. The column’s author, Sr. Joan Chittister, lambasted as haters those who would defend conscientiously objecting florists, photographers and other businesses against being forced to provide services related to same-sex weddings.⁴ Chittister accused these objectors and their supporters of wanting to “discriminate against people in the name of ‘religious freedom,’” and equated them to, among others, the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis.⁵ I prayed regarding my second friend, “Lord, forgive this one who knows not what was wrong here, sending me an article falsely comparing my views to ideologies of racial hatred.”

Around the time of this exchange in Facebook postings, I attended a panel presentation at the University of Notre Dame on the marriage redefinition controversy.⁶ Two of the panelists, Sherif Girgis

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⁵ Ibid. (“. . . the next time, you may be what someone considers ‘morally offensive to their deeply held religious convictions’ Just as were Jews, Catholics and blacks to the Ku Klux Klan in the United States. Or gypsies to the Nazis. Or now, homosexuals in Uganda. All of them [instances of what Chittister calls “moral discrimination”] by very religious people, they tell us.”).

and Ryan Anderson, were co-authors with Princeton Professor Robert George of the recent book “What Is Marriage?”7 The trio make the secular, philosophical case for defining marriage as the union of the sexes.8 In their Notre Dame remarks, Girgis and Anderson argued that eliminating the element of sexual difference removes any principled objection to also abandoning the requirements that a marriage relationship involve only couples, exclude sexual activity outside the marriage, and be permanent.9 They cited the rise in public support for marital practices involving “throuple” or “plural” arrangements,10 “monogamish” sexual commitments,11 and “wedleases.”12

Finally, I attended a Mass and surprise party for relatives of mine celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. Post-meal, the couple took center stage and, spurred by queries from family and friends, began to reminisce. In response to a question asking for the secret to their long and happy marriage, they replied that praying together daily had cemented their relationship and that having a sense of humor

8 Ibid., 6-10 (summarizing book’s argument).
also helped. At this point, one of their children called out from the back of the room, “Tell the sack story!” With the comedic timing of accomplished storytellers, the husband and wife related how one day she had had a difficult morning. He came home from work for lunch and according to her, was trying to be funny about something. But “it wasn’t a funny time for me,” and so she told him, “I don’t want to see your face!” He disappeared. A few minutes later he re-entered the kitchen with a paper sack over his head, with holes cut out for his eyes and mouth, and sat at the table, ready for lunch. She turned to the audience and said, with a smile on her face, “how could you stay mad at someone like that?” Amidst the responding laughter he proclaimed that this was the “first sack lunch” in history.13

These occurrences provide a roadmap for this Paper, connecting the visible with the invisible. As explained herein, Balthasar asked “who is the Church?” and replied that its most essential profile is found in the person of Mary, female in essence and not male or neuter. This sex-specific aspect of the Church differentiates it from Christ but precisely through that differentiation the Church’s Marian profile constitutes an essential condition for the Church’s union with Christ. This union of Christ and His Bride is conjugal and thus marriage, understood as the conjugal union of a man and a woman, both recapitulates this saving union of Christ and His Bride within the family, the domestic church, and affords us the means for acquiring greater understanding of the dynamics of our salvation generally.

The defense of marriage against redefinition therefore is of ecclesial significance on two levels. First, it involves not just a philosophical claim but pertains directly to our salvation—if we do not get marriage right, then we will not get the Church’s role in our salvation right. What is arising in the sociological sphere regarding “alternate” marital sexual arrangements provides data about what will happen and is already happening in the spiritual sphere. Marriage divested of sexual difference and its

13 The tale being told can be viewed online at https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10152344722153593&set=pb.736758592&type=2&theater.
sequelae import their own theological lessons of a radically altered nature.

Second, insisting on maintaining the biblical link between sexual difference, marriage, the identity of the Church, and our salvation will ultimately incriminate the Church—living publicly as Church in a manner faithful to this foundational nuptial understanding is already being treated as antithetical to the common good as conceived in secular, asexual terms. There will be no room for compromise. Eventually and inevitably, the Church will be forced underground. One’s faith in a divine truth, with its invisible origins, more so than one’s agreement with a philosophical proposition, will require heroic witness. The Church’s members will be tempted to avoid social ostracism and legal persecution by acceding to or at least not interfering with society’s demand for an illusory freedom that disregards the revelatory character of sexual difference, insisting in effect that God hide His face. Can we hope that God will remain faithful by nonetheless showing His visage in unexpected and merciful ways even despite our culture’s rejection of sexual difference as a sacramental reality? Who among us in return also will remain faithful?

I. Balthasar’s Genius—Rediscovering the Symbolic and Salvific Meaning of Sexual Difference as a Source for Understanding God, the Church and the Union of Both.

A. Balthasar’s Life of Receptivity.

Hans Urs von Balthasar was born in 1905 in Lucerne, Switzerland to devout Catholic parents of aristocratic means.\(^{14}\) His interest in theology came about “in rather a roundabout way” through his study of human culture and appreciation of music and literature.\(^{15}\) He was gifted with the musical talent of perfect pitch, permitting him to remember and hear concert pieces in his mind long after listening, and he could picture entire musical scores, allowing him to memorize all of Amadeus Mozart’s works for


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 2.
example. He exhibited an “undoubting faith from childhood” which contributed to his decision to write his doctoral dissertation, while a student at the “liberal Protestant” University of Zurich in the late 1920s, on the attitude that writers of modern German literature had toward beliefs about the soul’s final or eternal destiny, the Last Things. Just before he completed his doctoral studies, he made a thirty-day Ignatian retreat in the summer of 1927, where he experienced “the decisive turning point of his life.”

According to Balthasar, in a period of reflection during his retreat, the call to become a priest crackled unexpectedly “like lightning from a cloudless sky:”

[I]t was neither theology nor the priesthood which came into my mind in a flash. It was simply this: you have nothing to choose, you have been called. You will not serve, you will be taken into service. You have no plans to make, you are just a little stone in a mosaic, which has long been ready. All I needed to do was “leave everything and follow” without making plans, without wishes or insights. All I needed to do was stand there and wait and see what I would be needed for.

This spirit of receptivity in response to an initiative perceived as originating outside of one’s self led Balthasar to enter the Jesuits in 1929, be ordained a priest in 1936, and walk an unusual path in intensely reflecting upon and writing theology, and living it, outside the confines of academia. After completing his theological and priestly formation, he turned down an offer to teach at the Gregorian University in Rome. He chose instead to become a college chaplain, leading student retreats and giving guest lectures, because he considered the professorial environment and traditional academic career

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17 Ibid., 10.

18 Ibid., 11.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 12.

21 Ibid., 14.
route to be too constricting and insufficiently connected to the striving for holiness.\textsuperscript{22} One scholar indicates that Balthasar also regarded the manner in which scholastic theology was then being taught to be stultifying:

\[\text{[He] found St Thomas Aquinas interesting enough, but what his professors seemed to have done to St Thomas was so boring that he eventually resorted to stuffing his ears during lectures in order to read something much more thrilling: the writings of St Augustine and the early Church Fathers. . . . Theology, Balthasar believed, is supposed to be the study of the fire and light that burn at the centre of the world. Theologians had reduced it to the turning of pages in a dessicated catalogue of ideas – a kind of butterfly collection for the mind.}\textsuperscript{23}

After entering the priesthood and before reaching the point of making his final vows as a Jesuit, Balthasar met in 1940 and began providing spiritual direction to Adrienne von Speyr, a married physician, mother, and woman who had mystical visions throughout the rest of her life, and whom Balthasar eventually confirmed into the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{24} This began a spiritual dialogue that lasted twenty seven years until Speyr died of cancer in 1967,\textsuperscript{25} and that profoundly deepened the receptive character of Balthasar’s theology through Speyr’s devotion to Mary.\textsuperscript{26} For the last twenty years of his life, Balthasar strove to publish as much of Speyr’s writings as possible.\textsuperscript{27} “On the whole,” he wrote after her death, “I received far more from her, theologically, than she from me, though, of course, the


\textsuperscript{24} Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life,” 18, 19.


\textsuperscript{26} “There is ample evidence that not only von Balthasar’s Marian theology but--even more deeply--his personality structure, his habits of the heart, and his intellectual framework as well have been influenced and co-shaped by Adrienne von Speyr.” Johann Roten, “The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs van Balthasar,” in \textit{Hans Urs van Balthasar: His Life and Work}, edited by David Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 41.

exact proportion can never be calculated.”

Although he was not invited to participate in the proceedings of Vatican II, Balthasar became “one of the most prolific writers of our times,” started the influential theological journal *Communio* dedicated to implementing the Council’s vision, served from 1969 until his death on the Vatican’s International Theological Commission, and was appointed in 1971 as a theological secretary to the Second Synod of Bishops, meeting to discuss the ministerial priesthood. Pope John Paul II named him to become a cardinal but he died on June 26, 1988, two days before he was to be installed. Upon receiving news of his death, John Paul II wrote that Balthasar was “an outstanding man of theology and of the arts, who deserves a special place of honor in contemporary ecclesiastical and cultural life.”

Given the volume of Balthasar’s writing, this Paper relies at this stage primarily on his 1961 work entitled “Who Is the Church?”, exploring the connection between sexual difference, marriage,

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28 Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, 13. Balthasar never did take his final Jesuit vows. The Jesuits refused to assume oversight of a secular institute called the Community of St. John for men and women, that included priests, lay, and religious, and that was formed by Balthasar and Speyr. His superiors also declined to examine Speyr’s visions to verify their orthodoxy. Thus Balthasar left the order in 1950 while retaining his priestly faculties. Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life,” 21. He earned his living by lecturing and publishing. Ibid., 23. He was denied readmission later in life when the Jesuits again refused to accept responsibility for the Community of St. John. Ibid. 22.


30 Ibid., 31.

31 Ibid., 41.

32 Ibid., 35.

33 Ibid., 41.


B. Male And Female-Bridegroom And Bride-Christ And the Church

In his homily at Balthasar’s funeral, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger offered, among others, two observations about Balthasar’s theological vision which apply directly to the topic of this Paper. First, precisely because [Balthasar] knew that God is greater than all our thoughts and our hearts, he submitted himself to the concreteness of God, who, in the human face of Jesus Christ, looks at us in greater and more infinite measure than in all the negations of an unformed mysticism which remains, finally, within the person alone.

Second,

[v]on Balthasar had a great reverence for the Petrine, for the hierarchical structure of the Church. But he knew, too, that this is not her entire nor her deepest aspect. Von Balthasar spoke of the Church as Bride, as person. The Church is herself totally in persons, and exists most purely and entirely in her, out of whose Yes she was formed; in Mary, the Mother of the Lord. . . . He knew of the feminine in the Church, of the great symbolism of the virginal and the maternal, from Mary, he learned the humility of obedience, but also the responsibility of putting into action an embodied, effective love.


39 Ibid., 150.
Ratzinger’s homiletic overview highlights Balthasar’s regard for the conjugal nature of the union of Christ and the Church, wherein the male “human face of Jesus,” and the “feminine in the Church,” the female face of the Church's Marian personality, are viewed as integral to the economy of salvation. Balthasar himself wrote that “Because of her unique structure, the Catholic Church is perhaps humanity’s last bulwark of genuine appreciation of the difference between the sexes.”

Years before Pope John Paul II introduced his “theology of the body” in the late 1970s-early ‘80s, Balthasar anticipated the modern-day debate over the theological significance of marriage and sexual difference. As two commentators and feminist critics of Balthasar’s contributions in this area have put it, it was Balthasar’s “genius to have recognized that it has been decided that sexual difference is the question of the age[.]”

In “Who Is the Church?” Balthasar notes the interplay of two images, the Church as Christ’s body and as Christ’s bride. The first image points to the spiritual reality that the world and the Church owe their existence entirely to God, and the Church is, only because Christ the Son of God became human and suffered, the embodied means through which the world meets the divine and by which the world is infused with divine graces. The second image accounts for the New Testament data, especially in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 5, which in comparing “husband and wife on the

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41 Pope John Paul II devoted his remarks during his Wednesday audiences to the theology of the body beginning on September 25, 1979 and, with intermittent interruptions, finishing on November 28, 1984. His reflections were compiled and published in John Paul II, Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body, translated and edited by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). While these papal reflections did not reference Balthasar, the Pope was undoubtedly influenced by Balthasar’s thought according to George Weigel, John Paul II’s biographer. George Weigel, Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II: 1920-2005 (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 565.


one hand and Christ and the Church on the other obliges us to take the image of head and body in a nuptial and personal sense.\textsuperscript{44} The Church is “a ‘someone’ whom the Lord loved and for whom he delivered himself up, a ‘someone’, therefore, who in a certain way already existed[.].”\textsuperscript{45}

Balthasar argues that the personal identity of this ecclesial “someone” was not clearly indicated in Scripture and, excepting the Church Fathers, was submerged by theologies positing the Church, through the course of various historical turns, to be in its essence solely Christ, or solely a collective of human members, or some disjointed hybrid of the two.\textsuperscript{46} Thanks to “the theology of the Fathers,” Balthasar observed, there was

an extension and amplification of the bride motive [sic: “motif”?] that is not certainly authorized by Scripture: the Church (even though come forth from Christ, or purified and exalted by him) is made a subject on her own, with a womanly beauty, whose form and adornment, feelings and sentiments, destinies, humiliations and exaltations can be described. A powerful contribution to endowing the Church with a personality and life of her own was made from the earliest times (of Justin and Irenaeus) by the parallel drawn between Mary and the Church, which, in the twelfth century, came to pervade the commentaries on the Song [of Songs]: the Church as bride, difficult to grasp in herself as a person, appears as it were polarized in the person of Mary, and Mary herself as crystallizing around herself the whole community of the faithful. This idea may well have been, up to the present, the most suggestive for a personal conception of the Church.\textsuperscript{47}

Mary enters the salvation story through her womanly fiat, giving her yes to God through an act not just of her human will but also of her female body. In response to God’s initiative, besides her willingness and trust, she offered what only a woman can offer, her womb and her maternal flesh, within and by which God the Son could become human, nurtured to term, and mothered into human

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 147.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 143-45, 149-57.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 153.
adulthood. Leaving out the detail of her being a woman as if it were of no consequence renders invisible a defining character of her personal participation in this story. Shorn of her female identity, she would cease to be the “someone” she had to be in order for her fiat to fulfill God’s plan. According to Balthasar, “[i]t is part of her mystery and being that the Word became flesh, not only in but also from her, that her self-giving response to God was understood and required as something involving the whole person, something both spiritual and of the body. . . . She participated in the formation of the hypostatic union [of divinity and humanity in Jesus] in her own manner, a purely womanly one of surrender.”

Given the salvific significance of Mary’s personal existence as a woman, allowing her to be called to be the mother of God, her sexual identity cannot be erased without depersonalizing Mary.

That the second Person of the Trinity became incarnate as a male cannot be viewed with indifference either. According to Robert Pesarchick, Balthasar described Jesus’s mission as focused on revealing and making present God the Father. Though equal in divine status to the other Persons of the Trinity, the Father is the “absolute Origin of the Godhead” and therefore of all that is. Yet the Son, in receiving His origin from the Father, is through the Holy Spirit fully and uniquely capable of making the Father known within the limits of creation when He assumes human nature as Jesus. His physical maleness, as a part of creation and like all other created realities, is “receptive and responsive vis a vis God (and therefore analogously feminine)” and yet in the person of Jesus this male sexual identity “mirrors, [albeit] in a receptive and representational manner, the initiating fecundity or active actio of God.”

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48 Pesarchick., _The Trinitarian Foundation of Human Sexuality_, 163.

49 Ibid., 194.

50 Ibid.
the unseen Father.”

Jesus does not conduct unassisted His mission to reveal the Father’s love. Though as God He requires no “helper,” as human He is the “Second Adam” who needs and thus forms from His side at His crucifixion, and unites by His death with, the Church, His “New Eve” and co-missionary. It is this Bride of Christ, the New Eve, that Mary personifies. Through the fruitful marriage bond of Christ and the Marian Church, the conjugal love of the Father, the Origin of all and thus of the Trinity, can extend to the ends of the earth and to the end of time.

According to Balthasar,

[t]he bride is essentially woman, that is, receptive: one who, through acceptance of the seed but also through all her own female organs and powers is made competent to bring forth and bear fruit. In bringing forth at birth (which, in a broad sense, includes her care of the child and his feeding and upbringing to full independence), woman gives to man the complete, superabundant response. It is to such a Christian womanly role that the creature is educated by the structural, sacramental Church: the office [of the priesthood] and the Sacrament [of Holy Communion] are forms of communicating the seed; they belong to the male aspect, but their end is to lead the bride to her womanly function and fortify it. . . . Considered in the terms of Church law, it is true that the representative of the “office” has the masculine function of the one who gives, and the “laity” the feminine one of receiving; but it does not follow that the clergy are “more”, the laity “less”, the Church. The reverse is, in fact, the case, since the active communication is instrumental, the passive reception is the end, essentially ordered, to indeed basically one with, the female activity of seed bearing, giving birth, and educating.

Hence, Balthasar continues,

the Lord wills to see his Church standing before him, not as a singular, palpable failure but as a glorious bride worthy of him. Here the Marian principle in the Church necessarily comes into play. Mary is the subjectivity that, in its womanly and receptive manner is enabled fully to correspond to the masculine subjectivity of Christ, through God’s grace and the overshadowing of his Spirit. The Church flowing forth from Christ

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 196-97.
finds her personal center in Mary as well as the full realization of her idea as Church. . . . She [the Church] is not the Word but the adequate response awaited by God from the created sphere and produced in it by his grace through the Word.  

Balthasar’s theological reflections on the Trinity provide an additional and necessary perspective on the ecclesiological importance of marriage, understood as the union of the two sexes. His writings are too extensive to recount in anything more than a highly summarized form, and what I say next about his contributions on these topics is guided entirely by the above-referenced research of Robert Pesarchick and John Allen,  though I take full responsibility for my application of their expository work to the marriage definition debate. As these students of Balthasar ably demonstrate, Balthasar’s genius lies in his ability to situate sexual difference within the overall “drama” of natural and supernatural reality. The insights generated by his trinitarian explorations help bring into sharp focus what is lost ecclesiologically when marriage is redefined into an asexual institution.

C. Difference And Otherness: Trinitarian Foundations of Man and Woman

Balthasar follows the direction of the Church Fathers in peering into the very mystery of the Trinity, using the data generated by Christ’s incarnation, words and actions as means by which to begin to approximate by analogy what is, of course, otherwise totally inscrutable and always unfathomable. God is made known through Jesus as a divine communion of different Persons who, in the particular relational form of their mutual otherness, manifest a unifying exchange of generativity and receptivity. It is the very mission of Jesus to reveal enough about God’s inner trinitarian life of divine generation and

54 Ibid., 161.

55 See supra notes 36, 37.

56 “Balthasar’s key premise in Theo-Drama [a title of one of his major theological works] is that the best way to do justice to the content of Scripture is to employ dramatic rather than metaphysical categories. The relationships between God, the world, and the church are best conceived as a play whose impetus and momentum ultimately derive from the love of God.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 49.
reception so that all human persons may come to know how each can experience ultimate happiness by participating, with God’s grace, in this eternal beatitude.

Through Jesus and what He manifests by His incarnation we can begin to detect a pattern that marks the dynamics of God’s communal life, orders the salvific relation between God and the world, and invests sexual difference with eternal significance. At each of these levels of reality, generative and receptive capacities combine in distinctive ways to form the ontological DNA, as it were, of what it means to be God, man and woman, and the Church. An appreciation of this pattern helps us to find our place in life’s drama, as created receivers called to personally respond to God’s gifts of love and grace.

According to Balthasar’s theology, indebted to the Church Fathers, each Person of the Trinity is, with respect to particular divine attributes, either predominantly active or predominantly receptive in relation to each of the other Persons. For example God the Father, as Origin, is active when compared to both the Son Who is begotten by the Father and the Spirit Who proceeds from the Father. The Son and the Spirit receive from the Father, but not in an inert manner. Their receptivity is active but in a subsidiary way to the extent that the Son and the Spirit freely receive and return their gratitude to the Father for what only the Father gives them through His generativity. Similar relational exchanges occur in different directions whereby each Person shares with the others what only that Person can contribute. Though the relationships between the three Persons are asymmetrical in terms of Who shares and

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57 The generative-receptive pattern, reflecting the inner life of the Trinity is evident even at the microbiological level of the creation of the human embryo. “The first instant of fertilization is a kind of ‘echo’ in time of the divine procession of persons. Thus, just as the Son is ‘from’ the Father and the Holy Spirit is ‘from’ the Father and the Son, so the child is from the action of God and the parents. There is, then, a kind of remote parallel between the temporal coming-to-be of a person from the spousal, reciprocal gift of self and the eternal procession of divine Persons, one from and through another.” Francis Etheredge, “The Mysterious Instant of Conception,” The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly 12 (Autumn 2012): 429.
receives what gift, all three Persons are equally divine and eternal. The binding characteristics of the
differences and otherness existing between the three Persons, the very structure of love itself, make
possible the trinitarian communion as an eternal exchange of giving and receiving.58

In turn, as Balthasar’s thought is summarized by Robert Pesarchick with respect to man and
woman as “Imago Trinitatis,” image of the Trinity:

The coming together of Adam and Eve as man and wife, as “one flesh,” and the
fecundity that was to result from this union is intended by God as mirroring the mystery
of the Trinitarian “process.” There is a “primary” or “initiating” action on the part of the
man, in marital relations, which in giving over to the woman “awakens” her own
receptive, fruitfulness. In this union, the woman is to receive (actively) into herself the
“initiating” fruitfulness of the man, and in her receptive, “answering” fruitfulness bring his
to fulfillment by actively uniting it to her own fruitfulness. The gift she brings forth is
totally new and not merely a return of that which she received from the man: “This
means that the woman does not merely give back to the man what she has received
from him; she gives him something new, something that integrates the gift he gave her but
that ‘faces’ him in a totally new and unexpected form.” It is the active, initiating
fruitfulness of the man that is analogous to the active actio of the divine, loving process
of the Trinity. This act mirrors, however distantly, the originating action of the Father as
possessed in a “receptive mode” by the Son in the processions in God. The
receptive-active fruitfulness of the woman is seen to be analogous to the passive
(receptive) actio of the Son and the Spirit in relation to the Father. The fruit of the
loving union of the man and the woman, then, is analogous to the “overflow” of love
(“subjective” bond of love and “objective” witness) between the Father and the Son
that is the Person of the Spirit.59

Human sexuality remains within the worldly cycle of birth and death. But now, by virtue of
Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion, sexual difference points beyond itself not only to the inner life of
God, but also to what God desires for all—conjugal participation in the very life of Trinitarian love, the
nuptial union of Creator with Creation.60


59 Ibid., 185. See also ibid., 175-88.

60 Ibid., 208.
As Pesarchick recounts Balthasar’s reflections on this point:

Similar to the relations in the Trinity, there will then result a profound loving unity and fecundity, yet within distinction and differentiation. The Church will not become Christ, nor will mankind be subsumed into the Triune God. Rather, the *communio* between God and mankind will occur through the participation of mankind in the *communio sanctorum* of the Church that is brought about in the risen “eucharistic” Body of Christ.

But why should “distinction and differentiation” persist, whether within the inner life of the Trinity or the “pale reflection” of this divine life within the human family, manifested most fundamentally in the marriage of the two sexes? The answer as proposed by Balthasar provides even greater insight into the significance of identifying the relationship between Christ and the Church with the marriage of a man and a woman.

According to John Allen, Balthasar appreciated how the Church Fathers recognized within the Trinity’s tri-personal distinctions an “otherness” that nonetheless does not diminish the goodness or divine status of any one Person in relation to that possessed by the other two Persons, but that instead provides the essential “space” needed to facilitate the flow of divine love that affirms the good of the other. Further, “[n]ot only is ‘otherness’ and ‘distance’ required between the real relations for love to operate, but so too for the Son to be able to worship the Father. Balthasar explains that ‘all worship has its primary basis in the other’s otherness[.]’” Allen quotes the writings of Adrienne Speyr, edited by Balthasar: “Where there is mere oneness, worship is not possible. The Son does not worship the Father because the Father is like him; that would mean that the Son found himself worthy of worship and that

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61 Ibid., 210.

62 Ibid., 4, quoting Balthasar.


64 Ibid., 52-53.
he worshipped himself.”

Balthasar held that this divine internal “otherness” is echoed, however faintly, in the differences found between God and creation and between the sexes. If for example the Father loves the Son as One Who is “Other” than the Father, then this is the trinitarian ground for our belief that God loves creation, and loves us, precisely as “other.” In effect, “the generation of the Son as ‘other’ than the Father sustains and affirms the goodness of the otherness of creation,” since “[t]he ‘otherness’ in creation (male and female), and the ‘otherness’ of creation from God mirrors the ‘otherness’ in God.” Through this line of theological reflection, “Balthasar wants to ground the creaturely ‘other-than-God’ in the ‘uncreated “Other-in-God”’ while simultaneously ‘maintaining that fundamental “distance” which alone makes love possible.”

The “distance” that Balthasar identifies with “difference” or “otherness” capacitates love by allowing for a gift exchange to take place. If at the divine level every Person of the Trinity were self-generating, for example, then none would have need of the others and thus, in this scenario, each Person would be incapable of receiving, and would have no reason to accept, what all the others offer, the gift of being generated. Without generative-receptive differences there cannot be an interlocking bond that unifies. Instead of God the Trinity, there would be three isolated and competing gods.

According to Allen, Balthasar applies this analysis analogically to sexual difference. In the Trinity “there is a constant interplay between Giver and Receiver” and “Balthasar sees this analogy of

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66 Ibid., 43.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 45.

69 Ibid., 61.
Gift-Love acted out in what men and women are called to exemplify in their own love for the ‘other.’

Just as the Trinity can only exist as communion if there is within God reciprocating forms of otherness, “the sexes are likewise divided, but only for the sake of a greater unity[.]” Thus, “[i]n Balthasar’s mind there is difference and space for the sake of a greater unity that does not dissolve difference into sameness (in Trinitarian terms: monadism), but that preserves the uniqueness of the two in union with one another.”

When seen in the light of divine reality, as Allen quotes Balthasar, “[t]he fragmentation of nature through sexuality ceases to be tragic. Even nature differentiates in order to unite; how much more so does the bridal secret between heaven and earth, which gives us a share in the differentiation of the Trinitarian unity. On all planes the truth and depth of union depend on preserving the differences.”

This diversity introduces an “otherness” that does not exist between any two men or between any two women but that is to be found in every comparison of man and woman together. This “otherness” not only allows a man and a woman to physically consummate a marriage by becoming “one flesh” but also puts each in the position of being able to reveal to the other what the other as the different sex can never know directly. As Balthasar noted, according to both Pesarchick and Allen,

The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists, and the female body is utterly female; and this is also true of their whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness. At the same time both share an identical human nature, but at no point does it protrude, neutrally, beyond the sexual difference, as if to provide neutral ground for mutual understanding.

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70 Ibid., 69.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., 103.
In sum, though equal in human dignity, a status rooted in the differentiated equality that is found among the Triune Persons, men and women are not identical. Unlike at the divine level where each Person of the Trinity knows the Other perfectly, each sex remains, because of sexual difference, a mystery to the other. Yet this lack of sexual identity provides each with the opportunity to give and receive what is not, because of sexual difference, otherwise known, that is, their complementary persons and perspectives in being man and in being woman. This deeper, more transcendent capacity for sharing what only “otherness” allows to be exchanged is most concretely revealed in the “one-flesh” joining of husband and wife. The husband necessarily lacks what only a woman possesses (the female capacity to produce ova, receive the man’s sperm, and nurture any child that is begotten) and the wife lacks what only a man possesses (the male capacity to inseminate). They are thus both able to give to and receive from the other what the other cannot because of sexual difference.

D. The Ecclesiological Significance of the Church’s Bridal Identity.

If Balthasar is correct about the intrinsic nature of the Church’s bridal identity, then this means that our understanding of what marriage is plays a fundamental role in how the Church is to be structured, related to, and propagated. Balthasar notes that “the Church is uniquely the sphere that binds God and creature together.”75 This cohering together is a marriage, to which every aspect of the Church’s structure is directed:

The encounter that, at its maximum intensity, merits the name of marriage is personal and takes place between God as person and man as person, though all that gives this encounter an ecclesiological stamp is its prerequisite only and is not the encounter itself. . . . Nonetheless, it [the structural component] is there for the sake of the individual creature and fulfills its purpose only when he is reached and brought home to God. Much in these [ecclesial] institutions is, in the deepest sense, conditioned by time and disappears when fulfillment is reached in the next world. . . . What never falls away is

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the nuptial encounter between God and the creature, for whose sake the framework of
the structures is now set up and will later later be dismantled. This encounter, therefore,
must be the real core of the Church. The structure and the graces they impart are what
raise the created subjects up to what they should be in God’s design: a humanity formed
as a bride to the Son, become the Church.76

What Balthasar identifies as marriage, with the capacity through its human dimensions to
illuminate by analogy the dynamics of God’s nuptial encounter with humanity, necessarily is defined as
the union of one man and one woman:

The marriage union presupposes three things: (1) two persons, who, even in the union,
remain “unmixedly” (ausgeschütōs) persons, and only so are in a condition to experience
physical union as a rapturous encounter of their spirits or persons; (2) a physical union
of such a kind as to make them both truly “one flesh”, as is shown externally by the
result, the child, in whom the share of both is not only physically but also metaphysically
indistinguishable; (3) a physical opposition of the sexes that represents the opposition of
the spiritual persons in the bodily sphere and at the same time makes possible their
union in one flesh, this irreducible opposition being the basis of the irrefragable union.77

Should we definitionally alter any of these three elements, then marriage, understood as “a
symbol of the redemption,”78 would convey a different theological meaning that no longer corresponds
to biblical revelation:

If the first [element], the irreducibility of the subjects, were lacking to redemption, then
instead of redemption by grace, we should have a pantheism that eliminates the
creature. If the second, the one flesh as sacrament of the one spirit, were lacking, then
the unity would not be truly brought about, and we should remain with that juridical
conception that is generally (whether rightly or not) laid to the charge of Protestantism.
If the third, the relative opposition of the sexes, were lacking, we should lapse into a
kind of religious homosexuality, in which the creature would relate himself to God in a
masculine fashion, a sin of which non-Christian mysticism is guilty in a subtle way, as is,
in a less subtle way, religious magic, whose perverse encroachment on God himself
(appearing in angelic form) is depicted in the story of Sodom and its destruction. . . .
With God there can be no union of the same sex but only a feminine dependence on
God, as taught by Paul and Augustine: no taking but only a being taken. As the

76 Ibid. 157-58.
77 Ibid., 184-85.
78 Ibid., 188.
individual believer lets himself be taken by God, becoming a handmaid of the Lord, so the Church awakens in him and, in feminine fashion, reflects the Spirit of the Lord.\textsuperscript{79}

Thus the meaning of marriage transcends the philosophical, moral, political and sociological venues that heretofore have served as the theatres of battle in the marriage definition debate. If a Christian is forced or willingly agrees to affirm, either directly or through indirect cooperation with, celebrations that redefine marriage, then this implicates the rejection of what, if Balthasar is correct, Christianity holds to be fundamental to the very identity of God, Creation, and Christianity itself. The Church is the Bride of Christ the Bridegroom only if this relationship is understood as a marriage that, by virtue of its nuptial character, is the sacramental origin of, and does not ignore the illuminating difference and otherness found in, the conjugal relationship of husband and wife. Altering the marital institution to dismiss the significance of these qualities immediately places at risk the Church’s very identity and existence and every person’s salvation.

Andy Lichtenwalner notes, in his extensive historical review of the use of the bridal image to identify the Church, that this ecclesial understanding, “disclosed in the language of Scripture, has persisted in varying degrees and contexts throughout the Christian tradition, remaining a longstanding and preeminent image for the Church, with multiple meanings and connotations.”\textsuperscript{80} In addition, according to Brant Pitre in his excellent new book on Jesus the Bridegroom:

As you read the writings of the ancient Church Fathers, such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Augustine of Hippo, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and many others, the theme of Christ’s identity as Bridegroom and the Church’s identity as bride is treated as a staple of Christian teaching. This basic insight is used to shed light on virtually every aspect of the Christian life, from its beginnings in baptism, to its sustenance in the Eucharist, to the various states of life, such as marriage and virginity. In more recent times, the

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Andy W. Lichtenwalner, “The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2012), 7-8, available online at http://aladinrc.wrlc.org/bitstream/handle/1961/10259/Lichtenwalner_cua_0043A_10294display.pdf?sequence=1.
contemporary *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sums up the importance of this mystery when it teaches: . . . The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church (CCC 1617). If this is true—if the *entire* Christian life is marked by the “spousal love” of Jesus for the Church—then our focus on Jesus the Bridegroom should have the power to shed light on not only the deeper meaning of his life and death on the cross, but also the deeper significance of what it means to be Christian.\(^\text{81}\)

All persons deserve to know the Good News that the Church’s appreciation of sexual difference, signifying through the Church’s bridal identity humankind’s hope of salvation, must continue to impart. As Pitre writes, in the Old Testament prophecies, which Jesus came to fulfill, God is identified as the faithful spouse “who does not give up on his bride,”\(^\text{82}\) and thus,

> salvation is not just about the forgiveness of sins. From a biblical perspective, salvation is ultimately about *union with God*. The God of Israel is not a distant deity or an impersonal power, but the Bridegroom who wants his bride to “know” (Hebrew *yada’*) him intimately, in a spiritual marriage that not only is faithful and fruitful, but “everlasting” (Hebrew *‘olam*).\(^\text{83}\)

The next two sections explore the impact that redefining the element of sexual difference out of marriage portends for the Church. Such a change turns the prospect of salvational unity into an illusion by positing a non-conjugal universe, and it incriminates the Church by thrusting it directly into the aim of withering persecution.

**II. A Non-Conjugal Universe: What Redefining Marriage Would Teach (Wrongly) About Ecclesial Existence.**

**A. Two Views of Marriage Through Which to Discern the Nature of the Universe.**

In a recent point-counterpoint book co-written with Maggie Gallagher, who argues against


\(^{82}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 19.
redefining marriage, John Corvino opens his case for “extending” (rather than “redefining”) marriage to include two persons of the same sex by asking the reader to visualize an actual wedding ceremony celebrated by his friends Boyd and Josh. Corvino describes the participants’ “wedding jitters,” “stomach butterflies,” “teary-eyes,” the “hand-in-hand” procession down the aisle, the “smart black tuxedos,” the proud parents, the “sun . . . beating through the stain-glass windows,” the “simple floral arrangements” tied with cream-colored ribbons to the pews, and “everyone smiling.” Corvino observes that “[w]ere it not for the absence of a bride, you’d have a hard time distinguishing the scene from any other wedding.” “We know why Boyd and Josh are getting married,” Corvino continues: “They love each other and want to build a life together; they want to signal their commitment to their family and friends; they want others to acknowledge them as the family unit they understand themselves to be. Most people understand such aspirations; they are a familiar feature of human life.” But are these common goals enough, Corvino asks, “to justify expanding one of our most time-honored institutions?”

Yes, Corvino answers, and to make his overall point as to why society would benefit, he uses the example of Walter, a neighbor friend of Corvino, a widower in his seventies who announced that he was getting married to a woman similar in age. Why did Walter’s friends congratulate a man and a woman clearly past the childbearing years for deciding to get married? “Were we just being polite,

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85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 5.
88 Ibid., 5-6.
secretly thinking ‘Why bother?’”

No, according to Corvino, “[w]e congratulated him--and regard his marriage as a good thing--because Walter now (again) has someone special to take care of him and vice versa. Mutual lifelong caregiving is a good reason for promoting marriage whether or not children are on the horizon.”

Allowing more combinations of people to marry each other “would benefit society at large,” according to Corvino, because “[w]hen there’s someone whose job it is to take care of someone else, that’s good for the two of them, obviously. But it’s also good for their neighbors. Married people are, on average, less likely to burden the public purse. The things that make them happier and healthier at home also make them more productive members of society.”

Corvino admits this to be a minimalist understanding of what marriage is that can encompass a rather expansive range of relationships. The only “strictly necessary” conditions would be that “there must be at least two persons” and “[t]he partners must at some time understand themselves to be married.”

Corvino acknowledges, for example, that this view allows for the legal recognition of polygamous or polyamorous relationships (multiples of three or more), as long as advocates for affirming these arrangements can “make their case” that there are no net social costs.

The Catholic Church insists that more is required to create a marriage in order to more analogously reflect the conjugality of God’s inner life and our salvific union with God; mainly, that the two (and only two) individuals who are engaged to be married are complementarily capable of

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89 Ibid., 18.
90 Ibid., 19.
91 Ibid., 16.
92 Ibid., 41.
93 Ibid., 67.
physically joining with each other in the active-receptive, one-flesh-making conjugal act, that is, the kind of sexual relations by which children can be conceived should God will it. The exchange of reciprocal vows of life-long fidelity initiates the marriage while only the bodily uniting through coitus consummates it, making it permanent. This doctrinal understanding of what constitutes marriage is linked directly to conjugality, rather than to reproductive capacity (which, while important and associated, is implicated indirectly), and thus determines in the eyes of the Church that marriage is a relationship which, when consummated, unites man and woman in soul and in body, even if one or the other is (or both are) infertile.

The Church recognizes the value of friendship, “[w]hether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex,” in that “[i]t leads to spiritual communion.” As noted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “[i]n marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion.” For husband and wife, the conjugal act embodies what it signifies.

However a disembodied expression of spiritual communion, in and of itself, is not enough to echo the conjugal processions of the Persons of the Trinity or God’s conjugal union with us even if it commits the participants to, in Corvino’s words, mutual lifelong caregiving. Union between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and our ultimate union with God, are more than just platonic friendships. These

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94 See Code of Canon Law, Canon 1084 § 1, *Vatican.va*, last visited April 14, 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/__P3Y.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/__P3Y.HTM) (stating that pre-existing and permanent impotence on the part of either the engaged man or woman “nullifies marriage by its very nature”).

95 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1640 (“Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved.”).


97 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 2347.

98 Ibid., no. 2360.
eternal unions are and will be comprehensive, involving the whole person of each participant, and thus they can be mirrored adequately only in relationships between people seeking unity in both mind and body.

When taken as the image of the Trinity, according to the Catechism, “[t]he union of man and woman in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator's generosity and fecundity.”⁹⁹ When likewise seen as the icon of God’s relationship with the world, the bodily joining of man and woman which consummates a marriage imitates “the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for the ‘wedding feast of the Lamb.’”¹⁰⁰ Requiring that marriage be consummated by the conjugal act reflects that the universe is conjugal, both within and in response to God’s overflowing life. There is an actual and total integration, not erasing difference and otherness but depending on them to create communion. This visible, tangible, physical reflection of invisible realities, seeking a unity that engages the whole of one’s being in a manner analogous to the way God is love and the way God loves us, comprehensively and concretely, this is what is celebrated in the eyes of the Church when a man and a woman marry each other.

Corvino apprehends marriage more narrowly. He sees it to be in essence a relationship of mutual help. He considers it to be a public value only to the extent that it makes the participants happy and relieves society of its burdens. Its terms are dictated only by what the participants decide (they are married when they understand themselves to be married). Its members do not have to possess the capacity to join together physically and organically, and thus spiritual communion alone suffices. This vision of marriage, when used as the lens for discerning and interpreting deeper realities, presents a

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⁹⁹ Ibid., no. 2335.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., no. 1612.
contrasting view, different from that of Balthasar’s and the Church’s, one that reimagines the Trinity, God’s relation to creation, and the Church—indeed reality’s entire universe—as non-conjugal.

**B. What a Non-Conjugal Universe Would Look Like.**

To understand what living in a non-conjugal universe would mean, it helps first to refer to what love is, and then to imagine love’s absence or its incomplete realization. Alexander Pruss, in his illuminating book on Christian sexual ethics, *One Body*, finds love to contain “three aspects: willing a good to the beloved, appreciating the beloved, and seeking union with the beloved.”¹⁰¹ He observes further that “[t]he adage that love is blind would be a tragedy if true. For if one loves, one wants to know more about the beloved, in order to have more to love in the beloved.”¹⁰² In loving another, we should want to know the other as the other really is. Thus “[t]he nature of love calls on us to respond to reality, and this need to respond to reality is what makes the duties of love not be subjective.”¹⁰³ Further, “[a]ll love is directed toward some kind of real union.”¹⁰⁴ “Lovers want to be really united,” he continues; “they do not want others merely to deem them united or themselves merely to think themselves united. . . . The desire for real union is an important way for reality to enter into love.”¹⁰⁵ In sum, “[l]ove makes one pursue real union. Real union, thus, has to be attainable.”¹⁰⁶

By this measure then, love is thwarted if an available form of union with another is not sought

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¹⁰² Ibid., 25.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 94.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 33.
when or as it should be sought, or if a union is sought in circumstances in which it is unobtainable, creating the illusion of unity. Illusion, whether mistaken or intentional, substitutes the apparent for the real and thus frustrates the goals of love by rendering it more difficult and even impossible to discern what is actually good for the other, what is truly appreciable in the other, and whether and how union with the other is appropriate and achievable. Illusion thus is an obstacle to knowing more about the other in order to love more of who the other is.

Romantic love is a foundational form of love, which is consummated through sexual intercourse in marriage. Pruss observes that procreative “[s]exual intercourse is the most thoroughgoing form of biological unity as one body in which two human beings voluntarily, mutually, and equally can engage.” The bodily unity is found in the result that, through the conjugal act, a man and a woman form an integrated whole that alone is naturally capable of begetting new human life. Not only that--there is a universal character to this personal encounter in that both the entirety and overall unity-in-difference of the human family is represented in the cooperative presence of both sexes, constituting the smallest social unit in which such complete representation of humanity is possible. This combination of organic unity, procreative potential, and efficient universality is real and it is unique.

Where the participants in this bodily joining of both sexes love each other and demonstrate that love by marrying for life, their commitment to each other results in all of humanity being deemed, through each participant serving as proxy, as worthy of being forever loved, being lovingly appreciated as equally valuable even though differentiated, and being equally called to enter a loving unity. Because it is generally associated with generation, their commitment is open to the future. Because it bridges the most basic human divide of sexual difference, their commitment affirms the need and possibility of social

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107 Ibid., 275, 364, 367.
108 Ibid., 162.
reconciliation at all levels of division. Because it brings together those initially hidden from each other by the fundamental otherness of sexual difference, it provides for increased trust and love through the gift and receipt of further personal revelation and deeper knowing, a sharing that only an encounter in otherness can occasion.

When viewed by analogy as a microcosm of all of reality, the conjugal relationship that joins man and woman in marriage implicates a connected universe, one where tangible, visceral, and thus more than virtual contact is possible. It images an affirming universe, where all that is, is good. It reflects an integrated universe, where difference exists only for the purpose of bringing closer together. It shows an accessible universe, where the mystery of the unknown invites discovery rather than alienation. It portrays a comprehensible universe, where one can be certain of being loved and how to love without illusion. Most of all, it reveals a friendly and communal universe, made such that through it God creates and reaches us in his divinity, becomes present among us by becoming human, and unites with us by dying to bring us to new life.

In contrast, a non-conjugal universe would lack these qualities. Isolation instead of connection, anxiety instead of affirmation, competition instead of integration, doubt instead of discovery, confusion instead of comprehension, and distrust instead of communion would form the interstices and fibers of the sort of ultimate existence that redefining marriage would presuppose. An indifference to conjugality refuses to acknowledge as significant what only the marriage of a man and a woman possesses—a unitive and procreative identity. Equating to marriage other relationships that are non-conjugal in nature, solely on the basis of their consisting of more than one participant, and of their being classified as marital by those who enter them, displaces that which is divinely received—one’s embodied male or female person—with that which is humanly willed.
A few microcosmic examples suffice. A relationship between two persons of the same sex leaves out any individual that would represent the other half of the human family. The participants choose each other from a pool of candidates that is limited precisely because their sex is the same, and both prefer one sex, their own, over the other sex. This preference is not found in marriages of husband and wife, where both sexes are included; each participant there would affirm both sexes by loving the other as one’s self. Thus the former relationship fails to image all that is, and raises questions about whether all that is is equally good. Given their lack of physical ability to unite organically, the two must necessarily separate body from mind, their desire for unity thwarted by their inability to unite conjugally, through a spiritual and bodily communion, should they choose to engage in sexual conduct to affirm their love. In turn, multiples, consisting of “throuples” (threesomes) or more, turn “one and only” into “one and one and one, etc.” This introduces competition. Furthermore, “monagamish” arrangements that allow for open adultery, and temporary “wedlease” agreements that eliminate permanence, likewise promote disconnection, uncertainty, competition and confusion.

In a universe that models such relationships, God necessarily plays a role that is distant, noncommittal, and virtual. One could enjoy no certainty or confidence in God’s providence. God need not become human in any manner that weaves heaven and earth together so as to facilitate a real meeting of Creator and creature. There would be no covenant on God’s part to redeem anyone. God could be selective, privileging some here, leaving others there. A non-conjugal universe would lack the gift-receipt exchange of God’s entire self that calls for our comprehensive response. He could hide behind the illusion of apparent unity. He need never show His face. This is a vision that the Church, at its extreme peril, rejects as illusory.

C. What Then of the Church?
The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, emphasizes at its very beginning that “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race[.]”\(^{109}\) The plan of the “Eternal Father” is “to raise men to a participation of the divine life”\(^{110}\) To this end,

The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits. By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, “Come!” Thus, the Church has been seen as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”\(^{111}\)

According to the Catechism, “God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the ‘convocation’ of men in Christ, and this ‘convocation’ is the Church.”\(^{112}\) Additionally, “[The Church’s] structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members. And holiness is measured according to the ‘great mystery’ in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom.”\(^{113}\) Hence, “[t]he Church’s first purpose is to be the sacrament of the *inner union of men with God*. Because men’s communion with one another is rooted in that union with God, the Church is also the sacrament of the *unity of the human race*.”\(^{114}\)

This union with Christ is not just virtual and spiritual; it is a bodily joining. Jesus “proclaimed a

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\(^{110}\) Ibid., ¶ 2.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., ¶ 4.

\(^{112}\) Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 760.

\(^{113}\) Ibid., no. 773.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., no. 775.
mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”¹¹⁵ Thus “[t]he comparison of the Church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and his Church. Not only is she gathered around him; she is united in him, in his body.”¹¹⁶

To the extent and in light of the fact that “the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions,” it is true to say from this perspective that as all human divisions are thereby relativized by our union with Christ, then “there is neither male nor female.”¹¹⁷ In the face of God’s initiating love, all are called to accept and receive this gift. Nonetheless, this relativization does not erase sexual difference’s signifying association with God’s and the universe’s conjugality. Our being male or female points to every Christian’s conjugal relation as Bride to Christ the Bridegroom. As noted by the Catechism, “[t]he unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one body, also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride.”¹¹⁸

The Catechism quotes St. Augustine: “‘So they [Christ and the Church] are no longer two, but one flesh.’ They are, in fact, two different persons, yet they are one in the conjugal union, . . . as head, he calls himself the bridegroom, as body, he calls himself ‘bride.’”¹¹⁹

This doctrinal regard for the bridegroom-bride form of conjugality again points to the significance of Mary’s role. As woman, mother, and virgin spouse, “Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church’s mystery as ‘the bride without spot or wrinkle.’ This is why the ‘Marian’

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¹¹⁵ Ibid., no. 787.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., no. 789.
¹¹⁷ Ibid., no. 791.
¹¹⁸ Ibid., no. 796.
¹¹⁹ Ibid.
dimension of the Church precedes the ‘Petrine.’” Her witness demonstrates that “[o]nly faith can embrace the mysterious ways of God’s almighty power. This faith glories in its weaknesses in order to draw to itself Christ’s power. The Virgin Mary is the supreme model of this faith, for she believed that ‘nothing will be impossible with God,’ and was able to magnify the Lord[.]”

Taking Mary’s lead in receiving and responding to with faith God’s initiating love, every member of the Church is “called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one.” As the Catechism continues: “The ultimate purpose of mission is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of love.” Since “[t]he sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church,” the question of what is marriage, even as posed in secular terms, is not incidental to Christian witness. The issue instead touches on the very core of what it means to be a follower and missionary of Christ. Christians seek conjugal union with God, desiring that all others, too, may experience this communion, both as a foretaste in the present and fully at the end of time. The communion the Church proclaims is a relationship and an event that revelation has described in conjugal terms as a marriage. The Church hopes and trusts in a God believed to be, like the universe, conjugal in nature. The Holy Spirit sends Christians into the world precisely in their role as members of the Church who is the Bride of Christ.

Thus the Church will remain at the center of the marriage definition debate--its identity, its

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120 Ibid., no. 773.
121 Ibid., no. 273.
122 Ibid., no. 871.
123 Ibid., no. 850.
124 Ibid., no. 1661.
message, and its mission are directly at stake. Indeed, for this very reason, as the next and final section discusses briefly, the Church will suffer and unavoidably so.

III. Ecclesia Discrimens—How Refusing to Devalue Sexual Difference Makes the Church Public Enemy #1.

The Church, with its conjugal understanding of God, the world’s relation to the divine, and its own identity, will not be able to coexist with the changing cultural, political and legal mores that call for the redefinition of marriage on the basis that sexual difference bears no public significance. Discrimination, as conceived by those who say they see it in any teaching, policy or rule that defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman, has become the social sin of the age. Any individual or organization that continues to insist publicly and even privately that marriage is an institution that brings the sexes together for, among other purposes, the well-being of children has become public enemy number one in the opinion of a growing sector of society. Just within the time that this Paper was being written numerous media stories reported incidents where private individuals lost their jobs and public speakers were lambasted because they refused to disavow their support for, or even decided to promote within Church settings, the Church’s teaching on marriage and sexuality.

The time of intense social persecution is here. It will not be long before penal sanctions follow, and I believe the Church will be forced underground in the West because of its teaching. At hand is the late-stage implementation of what Pope-Emeritus Benedict XVI, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, identified in 2005 as the “dictatorship of relativism.” How should the Church prepare? Two admittedly spare responses are offered.

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125 “Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine,’ seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.” Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Homily at the Mass “Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice,” April 18, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.
First, own the reproach that the world gives the Church for speaking the truth in love.

The Church discriminates! That is the reproaching charge laid against it. Yes, the Church does discriminate, but not in the sense commonly taken when the word “discriminate” is used today. The word’s etymological trail has long since grown cold and so historians cannot agree whether “criminate” derives originally from *cernere*, Latin for “to decide, to sift,” or from *cri-men*, Latin for “cry of distress,” either of which could have become “crime.”¹²⁶ When connected into the word “dis-criminate,” then, the linguistic pathway elicited early neutral meanings of “to divide, separate” and “interval, distinction, difference,” which then branched into the positive sense of “possessing discernment,” and today’s more familiar negative sense of adverse rejection.¹²⁷ The marriage battle front lies at the juncture of deciding whether what the Church believes about marriage and sexual difference is positive or negative.

The Church rejects nothing that is good. In the marriage context, all persons regardless of their sex or sexual attraction are God’s good creation, loved by God, and equal in value as subjects of God’s love. Thus the Church refuses to see anyone as an object to be used and rejects any action that treats one’s self or another as an object. Marriage, with its expectation of consummation through sexual intercourse, is ordered towards conjugal communion, which affirms the subjectivity of those who participate by integrating bodily union with spiritual union. To redefine marriage so that non-conjugal relationships can be promoted as marriage-eligible is to encourage sexual intercourse that cannot


accomplish bodily union. Where bodily union cannot be achieved, sexual intercourse results in persons being used for mutual pleasure.\textsuperscript{128} The Church refuses to devalue persons and thus cannot accept marriage’s redefinition to that end. No one should be encouraged to become objects whose intrinsic personal value is subjugated to pleasure. Thus the Church stands for dis-”in”criminating everyone equally by refusing to cooperate in any way with the promotion of such devaluation through redefining marriage. What advocates for redefining marriage see as discriminatory harm is from the Church’s perspective the discerning avoidance of conduct that incriminates a person as an object of use.

Second, do not allow a fear of making mistakes to take over. As one who stepped on a live wire while attempting to communicate (poorly) on one aspect of the marriage debate,\textsuperscript{129} I am challenged by the words of Pope Francis:

> When the Church loses [its] apostolic courage, she becomes a stalled Church, a tidy Church, a Church that is nice to look at, but that is without fertility, because she has lost the courage to go to the outskirts, where there are many people who are victims of idolatry, worldliness of weak thought, [of] so many things. Let us today ask St Paul to give us this apostolic courage, this spiritual fervor, so that we might be confident. “But Father,” [you might say], “we might make mistakes…” ... [“Well, what of it,” I might respond], “Get on with you: if you make a mistake, you get up and go forward: that is the way. Those who do not walk in order not to err, make a more serious mistake.\textsuperscript{130}

The way forward is dark. Yet our faith illuminates the night and will see us through. This is a test of just how weak we will have to become in order for God’s power to shine forth. Redefining marriage attacks the very basis of the Church’s identity and its view of God and the world. We cannot avoid the

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\item \textsuperscript{128} The demeaning of persons is also true for non-conjugal intercourse engaged in by couples consisting of both sexes. Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2351, 2352.
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conflict but we can remain faithful. The “sack lunch” story recounted at the beginning of this Paper can be taken as a prophecy of sorts. God’s Face will show. We just have to look for Him.