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**Pneumatological Ecclesiology and Same-sex Marriage:
A Non-essentialist Approach Using the Work of
Eugene Rogers and John Zizioulas**

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The debate surrounding the morality of homosexual marriage is one of the most charged and fractious in the church today. As local congregations, national denominations, and international affiliations of Christians wrestle with this issue, significant conflict and division has arisen and continues to rage. At the center of this debate are so-called "arguments from creation," that is, arguments that look to the natural or revealed "order of things" to discern God's design for appropriate sexual behavior. This mode of theological argumentation has a long history in the tradition of natural theology, which assumes that divine direction (and even divine speech) is inherent in creaturely capacities. In this article, I will demonstrate that New Testament scholarship is agreed that in Romans 1:18-32 (the key NT text on the issue), Paul is not making an argument *per se* against homosexuality. Instead, this passage fits within the larger claim that he is trying to make throughout the book of Romans about Jew-Gentile relations. What Paul condemns here is the human propensity to judge others based on supposedly intrinsic qualities. He is using a stereotypical Jewish understanding of Gentiles, and turning it back against those who would argue for some special innate characteristic within Jews that makes them special and within Gentiles that makes them depraved.

To develop my case, I will show how two significant figures in NT scholarship today – Richard Hays and David Horrell – see Paul's leveling of the Jewish-Gentile divide as the key point that Paul is seeking to make in Rom. 1:18-32. If we read this text in isolation, however, we make the mistake of assuming he is advancing an argument from creation against homosexuality and we miss the main thrust of his line of reasoning. Rather than repeating this mistake, I will attempt to return to Paul's main point in Romans 1 *and* 2 – that Jews occupy a special place because of the election of God, not because of something intrinsic to their being Jews.

I will use Paul's discussion as a jumping-off point for deeper theological reflection on same-sex marriage by exploring the work of John Zizioulas and Eugene Rogers in order to develop the ecclesial implications of this interpretation of Romans 1 and 2. The collective weight of these two voices provides a creative, scripturally grounded approach offering a way around the current polarized debate. Rogers helps us to reflect carefully upon the place of the Gentiles in Israel's body; Zizioulas aids us in returning to the baptismal character of the church. Combining these ideas together allows the affirmation of the *potential* goodness of all marriage, heterosexual and homosexual alike. The word "potential" is used intentionally. Vital to my claims is that marriage is not *necessarily* good; it does not derive its essential goodness from its relationship to an ideal. Rather, its goodness is found only in its concrete display – in actual marriages between real people. Further, marriage only *becomes* good through its participation in the re-creative reality of Jesus Christ. Combining Rogers's and Zizioulas's ideas with insights gained from contemporary Pauline scholarship allows me to support my central thesis that a commitment to Pauline logic and the repudiation of all arguments from creation leads us to the place where we can affirm same-sex marriages in the church.

The danger in this article is that the ideas I develop would remain only in the abstract and are never grounded in the practices of real churches. Same-sex marriage is by no means an abstract issue – it has concrete ecclesial implications. To explore these implications more deeply, I examine one example of a positional statement from a mid-sized Canadian Protestant Evangelical denomination, *The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (hereafter, CCMBC).¹ I chose to examine this denomination's statements on same-sex marriage, not because they are unique but because they are broadly representative of other evangelical groups in Canada. A closer examination of the CCMBC's position will allow me to demonstrate, in concrete terms, how the theological approach to gender, sexuality, and marriage that I present in this article presses churches and denominations to consider more deeply their own positions on these issues.

The CCMBC Position on Homosexuality

The CCMBC confession of faith states that "Disciples maintain sexual purity

and marital faithfulness and reject immoral premarital and extramarital relationships and all homosexual practices,” and “Marriage is a covenant relationship intended to unite a man and a woman for life.”² A recent denominational pamphlet on same-sex relationships entitled *Homosexuality: A Compassionate yet Firm Response*, fills out the confession to provide the most current, in-depth summary of the CCMBC position.³ The authors of the pamphlet are sincere in their attempts to ground the denomination’s position on homosexuality in Scripture. However, what emerges from this presentation is what I term “an argument from creation,” that is, a claim that there is something in the creation, in and of itself, that reveals the truth. The authors set up the following claim regarding the exclusivity of heterosexual behavior:

Genesis teaches clearly that it is man and woman together who carry the image of God. Something of the image of God is expressed in the maleness of man and the femaleness of woman (Genesis 1:27-28; 5:2). Though the image of God is carried equally in the femaleness of woman and maleness of man, it is the covenant relationship of marriage, which includes the sexual union of woman and man, that the richness and the complementary nature of the image of God is expressed most fully.⁴

In another section they write, “...The Scriptures declare same-sex relationships to be deviant sexual behaviour...” and,

The Biblical argument against same-sex relationships and sexual intercourse is that it is un-natural (Romans 1:21–32) and violates the complementary image of God as expressed in the maleness of man and the femaleness of woman. It is for this reason that it is expressly forbidden in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The authors argue that something within the natural or created order of things makes a heterosexual marital union most evocative of the image of God; in their words, the union of male and female creates “something of the image of God.” The appeal to “the” biblically revealed order of things is central to the argument developed in this pamphlet. Homosexuality violates

the inherent complementarity of the genders.⁵ The authors' assertion that something essential in the "maleness of the male" and the "femaleness of the female" unites to express humanity's image in God fits within what Mary McClintock-Fulkerson calls the ontologizing of gender. She says,

The modern subject is an autonomous self ... s/he is defined fundamentally by his or her sexual identity. This peculiarly modern move...identifies sexuality as the central explanatory principle in human subjects....This...produces the notion that one's sex/gender coincides with one's essential self.⁶

I share McClintock-Fulkerson's rejection of the ontologizing of gender on biblical grounds. In my view, one benchmark of Paul's thought is that we cannot see beyond our human limitations into the essence of things. In my reading of the "fall" story in Genesis 2 and 3, humanity's claim that "we can be like God, knowing good and evil" I understand as Adam and Eve's desire to transcend their creaturely limitations and see into the essence of things, which is the definition of sin.⁷ Against this backdrop, the NT proclaims that Christian existence is about absolute dependence on God. Instead of asserting that we know the truth of things, Christians proclaim that existence is contingent and inhabited by a deep dependence on Jesus Christ. Only through Christ do we gain knowledge of the truth; we do not gain this knowledge by claiming that we can comprehend truth by looking, unmediated, at creation.

Thus, if ontologizing gender mirrors the Serpent's lie, then we must employ a different approach to derive a biblical position on gender complementarities. A biblical view, I argue, is to look at gender in a relational manner. This approach benefits from not having to attach some amorphous essence to men and women. Nor do we simultaneously have to explain, as the CCMBC position attempts to do, how the union of maleness and femaleness creates the divine image *and* how the image of God is carried fully in each gender.⁸ A relational position does not require some inherent gender capacity; instead, people receive the image of God from outside of themselves through Jesus Christ, the God-man who *is* the image of God into which we are being conformed. Before I articulate a relational approach more fully, I wish to deal with Rom. 1:18-32 in greater depth.

Romans 1, Gentile Depravity, and the Law

In broader conservative-evangelical theological discourse, Romans 1 provides the most significant hermeneutical firepower in the debate over homosexual practice.⁹ In this passage, so it is claimed, Paul links homosexuality with idolatry and describes the homosexual practices of both men and women as abominable – “exchanging the natural for that contrary to nature (*para phusin*)” in his terminology.¹⁰ Most conservative-evangelical denominations, including the CCMBC, conclude that the Bible issues a blanket prohibition of all same-sex behavior and that Paul proscribes all homosexual behavior by connecting homosexual actions to pagan religious practices.¹¹

However, it is worth inquiring as to whether these verses in Romans are theologically equipped to create doctrinal closure on homosexuality. To anticipate my conclusion, I argue that Rom. 1:18-32 lacks the theological equipment to create such closure. The main point of Paul’s argument is that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ calls all human judgments into question. Because his point is not to state a position on homosexuality, neither should we.

I begin this discussion by looking at how prominent NT scholars David Horrell and Richard Hays handle the exegesis of Romans 1. In general, they both follow the same exegetical trajectory. They both affirm that the law functions positively in Paul, and that he retains a more or less Jewish approach to it. Looked at from a Jewish perspective, there is no law apart from the Torah, and so any “natural law” must be derived from the Torah. Neither Horrell nor Hays opts for a “Lutheran” interpretation of Paul that takes an extremely dim view of the law, natural or Jewish.

Horrell argues that in Rom. 1:18-32 Paul appeals to a kind of natural law ethic. In Horrell’s reading of Paul, nature displays the imprint of an Orderer who has construed the creation in such a way as to make certain ethical truths self-evident to those with the intelligence to comprehend them: “The knowledge of God is through a form of natural theology, since it comes via reflection on the visible things of creation.”¹² Horrell argues that Paul needs an empirically identifiable conception of right and wrong to make his argument work:

Whether Paul is right or wrong to depict all people as failing to live up to moral standards, the crucial point is that he argues – and *has* to argue – for a universal sense of what is right and wrong, a universal knowledge of God.¹³

However, Horrell nuances his description of natural law in Paul. The law is not natural in that it is evident apart from God. The law can be comprehended only because God has decided to reveal it to the Gentiles. Thus, the natural law is those portions of the Jewish law that God has chosen to make evident to the Gentile world.

Richard Hays takes a similar position on the natural law. However, he argues more strongly for its revealed character. For him, Paul's conception of so-called natural law is really the law *revealed* through Jewish narrative tradition and scriptures; empirical evidence is not required. In his book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Hays states that

When the idea [of the unnaturalness of homosexual acts] appears in Romans 1 ... we must recognize that Paul is hardly making an original contribution to theological thought on the subject; he speaks out of a Hellenistic-Jewish cultural context in which homosexuality is regarded as an abomination, and he assumes his readers will share his negative judgment of it.... Though he offers no explicit reflection on the concept of "nature" it appears that in this passage Paul identifies "nature" with the created order.... The understanding of "nature" in this conventional language does not rest on empirical observation of what actually exists; *instead, it appeals to a conception of what ought to be*, of the world as designed by God and revealed through the stories and laws of Scripture.¹⁴

As with Horrell, Hays does not argue that Gentiles can comprehend God's law through simple observation. Rather, he sees Paul's argument in Romans 1 as being constructed from a traditional Jewish perspective. In other words, the Gentiles have enough of the Jewish law so as to stand convicted by it. (But again, this is not obvious or unmediated knowledge.) Only from the perspective of one infused with the stories of Israel's scriptures can it be obvious that pagan sexual immorality is evidence that the Gentiles are

idolaters and are thus reaping the consequences of their idolatry by engaging in homosexual acts. While Hays tends to stress the revealed character of the law and Horrell the empirically observable character of the law, both are essentially agreed that Paul is appealing to his readers' traditional Jewish understanding of both the law and acceptable sexual practices.

More to the main point of this article, both of these scholars agree that the depiction of the depravity of homosexual behavior in Romans 1 is neither the main point (if the point at all) of Paul's argument nor what makes it controversial. Rather, it is Paul's claim that the Jews, *who have God's written law*, are no better off than depraved Gentiles who can only dimly intuit that same law through their darkened minds. "It is clear," Horrell states, "that Paul presents these arguments to establish an essentially negative conclusion: that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, stand liable to God's judgment."¹⁵ Hays says, "The radical move that Paul makes is to proclaim that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, stand equally condemned under the judgment of a righteous God."¹⁶ The similarity of these two statements is striking and adds considerable weight to this point.

However, after conceding that Paul's argument is about convincing Jews that they stand equally condemned by God's righteous judgment, both scholars depart from this point and focus instead on the "creation order" aspects of this passage. In my view, this move is a mistake. There simply is not enough freight behind Paul's appeal to the natural order to construct a theological position on homosexuality. Instead, I think it is better to stick with the main flow of Paul's discussion, which is not to highlight the idolatry, depravity, and excessive lust of the Gentiles, but rather merely to get nods of approval from his Jewish audience. Horrell and Hays both agree that Paul is repeating a common of Jewish stereotype of Gentiles as excessively lustful and sexually depraved. The point of Rom. 1:18-32 is to set up a rhetorical trap. On the general depravity of Gentiles, Paul will get nods of agreement. But then, with careful sleight of hand, he argues that in God's view Jews are no different. They are no better off than Gentiles. In God's sight, all of humanity suffers from a lack of intrinsic or inherent ability to fulfill God's command.

Let me restate my central point: Paul is not speaking to *our* issue of homosexuality; instead he is addressing a different and more universal

issue, namely that all our attempts to please God through our creaturely actions, abilities, or inherent characteristics, even religious attempts, are bound to fail. As Paul says elsewhere in Romans, “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.”¹⁷ By “all” he means Jew and Gentile alike. Jews have no intrinsic basis on which to claim a special relationship with God. Their “chosen-ness” derives from God’s grace, not from their inherent superiority. And if this is the case, then why could God not choose to save the Gentiles? In his answer to this question, Paul is advancing perhaps his most radical claim in Romans: Jews cannot claim to know with certainty that God has excluded Gentiles from the Kingdom. Because of Jesus Christ, the Gentiles are also recipients of God’s gracious election; they are not *a priori* excluded because of their “Gentile-ness.”

Eugene Rogers makes the same case in his book, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*.¹⁸ He contends that for a Jew, one of Paul’s most controversial ideas was that God could include Gentiles as members of the covenant people without the need for circumcision and the keeping of Torah. Paul did not begin with this position, but originally held to the traditional Jewish perspective, which required Gentiles to become Jews and in turn cemented their status as members of the people of Israel. His change of heart came not through research but through observation and experience. In the newly emerging churches, he witnessed the Holy Spirit working among uncircumcised Gentiles and concluded that God must be up to something new.¹⁹ This experience led him to re-examine the Jewish scriptures and to conclude that in Christ God is extending a covenant relationship to the Gentiles *as Gentiles* (i.e., not with their first becoming Jewish). He does this in Romans 9-11, where he develops the agricultural metaphor of the engrafting of the Gentiles as wild olive shoots into the root of the domestic olive tree.²⁰ Paul says that God accomplished this engrafting contrary to (or beyond) nature (*para phusin*).²¹

Rogers makes a great deal out of the strange choice of phrase in Rom. 11:24, “contrary to nature.” This phrase occurs in the NT only here and in Rom. 1:26, where Paul says God had given the Gentiles up to idolatry through their contrary-to-nature desires. Now, God *saves* the Gentiles through a process contrary to nature – wild shoots do not naturally belong with domestic roots. Ironically, as Rogers points out, “God saves the

Gentiles by adapting to God's own purposes that apparently most offensive Gentile characteristic" (their "wildness").²² The natural branches (the Jews) have been cut away to make way for the wild branches (the Gentiles). The rhetorical force of this metaphor is to encourage humility among Gentile Christians. Gentiles, as unnatural branches, stand in a precarious position. They do not belong. Their status as members of the covenant people comes only through God's radical grace in Christ. And their inclusion is part of God's larger purpose to make the Jews jealous and cause them to return to God. Rogers points out that "the Gentile Church . . . has no God of its own. It worships another God, strange to it, the God of Israel, and Gentile Christians are strangers within their gate. . . . Christians owe their very salvation to God's unnatural act."²³

This discussion points to a significant tension between the natural and unnatural in Paul's thought. In other places, Paul associates the unnatural with the abominable. Witness 1 Corinthians 11, where he uses Genesis 2 (that Adam was created first) to argue that men should wear their hair short and women long or with their heads covered. The long hair or covering is a sign of the hierarchical ordering of men over women. He says, "Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?"²⁴ Here Paul is comfortable looking to nature for justification of the hierarchical ordering of men over women; he claims this approach simply appeals to what is self-evident. This idea stands in tension with the one he develops here in Romans. That Gentiles have been included as part of the people of God is unnatural; it is a process that runs contrary to nature and traditional Jewish beliefs.

For Jews in the first century, Gentiles were not by nature, by birth, or by citizenship members of the covenant people. Membership in the covenant people was largely determined by inherent characteristics, most significantly maternal linkages to the people of Israel, outside of which there was no salvation. Participation in the covenant had strong racial and ethnic components. Paul, however, turns this approach on its head. He claims that God, through the unnatural act of engrafting, has extended the covenant to incorporate the Gentiles, who by nature are excluded from that self-same covenant.

Gentile Inclusion and Same-sex Marriage

Where does this leave us in terms of same-sex marriage? Rogers contends that we can use Paul's argument about the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God as justification for the acceptance of same-sex marriages into the church:

As God grafts Gentiles, the wild branches, onto the domestic covenant of God's household with Israel ... so God grafts gay and lesbian couples ... by a new movement of the Spirit onto the domestic, married covenants of straight men and women.... The community of the baptized must be open *to the possibility* that the Holy Spirit is able to pour out holiness also on gay and lesbian couples, without erasing the distinction between gay and straight, as the Holy Spirit rendered the Gentiles holy without circumcision and keeping Torah.²⁵

Rogers argues for a parallel between Gentile inclusion into the covenant people and gay and lesbian inclusion into the church. Jews viewed Gentiles as by nature objects of God's wrath, subject to the excesses of immorality and sexual promiscuity. Without Gentiles first becoming Jews by circumcision and Torah obedience, they could not join the people of Israel. However, in Paul's view, God, through the Holy Spirit, has done something completely unexpected. He brought the Gentiles into the elect without first requiring circumcision and acceptance of Torah. In a similar way then, homosexuals have been regarded, at least in the modern era, as possessing unnatural desires (frequently, it is argued, brought about by biology and/or childhood trauma) and as particularly prone to sexual promiscuity and immorality.²⁶ However, Rogers argues that from observation and experience we may just be witnessing God, through the Holy Spirit, bringing covenanted gay and lesbian relationships into the church without their first becoming heterosexual.

Rogers also argues that God may be doing a similar thing with celibate relationships (i.e., marking a sexually non-reproductive relationship as capable of producing sons and daughters of God). In this view the church creates a whole new way to evaluate what constitutes "normal" or "natural" relationships. That is, the church provides a place where we can affirm

homosexual and heterosexual marriages, and singles and celibates, as equal partners.

The conservative reaction against this position is based on appeals to scriptural authority and goes something like this: If in the Bible Paul says homosexual behavior is a natural consequence of pagan idolatry, then it is. If we accept Rogers's argument, we will be going against the plain teaching of the Bible. As Hays insists, scripture and church tradition univocally proscribe homosexual behavior.²⁷ In order to respond to such objections, I will turn to the work of John Zizioulas, which provides a powerful, biblically centered, and theologically sophisticated counter-argument.

Zizioulas and the Misguided Ideal of Heterosexual Marriage

We can think of John Zizioulas's collection of essays, *Communion and Otherness*, as a theological reflection on the reality of our created existence.²⁸ For Zizioulas, that we are created *ex nihilo* means two things. First, we are not necessary; our existence is contingent. Second, death continually haunts us with the possibility of non-existence. Zizioulas makes a careful distinction between our *being* (the human nature we share with all of our species) and our *personhood* (our unique and particular identity as people-in-communion).

Our being is tied to our sexuality because through sexual reproduction we pass our human nature onto our offspring.²⁹ But sexual reproduction is inhabited with death. Sexual reproduction is about the survival of the species, not the survival of personhood. Nature or being is "incapable of producing such a truly and ultimately particular human being, in fact it does everything through its very mechanism of reproduction to prevent this from happening."³⁰ Personhood, on the other hand, is that part of us that is "absolutely unique and ultimately indispensable."³¹ Personhood is never self-realized; rather it is found in relationship with the Trinity, a communion of three persons sharing one uncreated substance.

Dominant thinkers within Christian theology have long attempted to deal with this conflict between human *being* (which is infused with death) and *personhood* (which resists the annihilation implicit in death) by positing an immortal soul that will one day escape from the necessity of our death-filled bodies. But according to Zizioulas this is an unacceptable solution because, as he puts it,

We *are* bodies, we do not *have* bodies.... And we acquire our... identities through the relationship of our bodies with other bodies, that is, through that part of our being which nature throws away after the survival of our species is secured.... Christian anthropology could never conceive of human identity without the body.³²

For Zizioulas, the only way to overcome the conflict between being and personhood is the resurrection of the body. God has designed our bodies in such a way as to be “the *locus* both of the conflict and the resolution,” not the prison from which our souls escape.³³ Christ became a body and experienced the death of the body and the threat of extinction, yet in his resurrection by the Spirit he overcame the conflict between being and personhood. His resurrection displays the primacy of personhood and particularity over biological necessity and death. Thus as humans we share in Christ’s resurrection through new birth (baptism) and communion in the church.³⁴

What does this have to do with our discussion of the morality of homosexual relationships? In Zizioulas’s words,

By means of Baptism, followed by the Eucharist, the Church offers us ...[the possibility of being saved from death], because it gives a new identity rooted in a network of relationships which are not obligatory, *like those that create the family and society*, but free.³⁵

He states further that the veneration and almost religious exaltation of human reproduction among Christian theologians and even official churches, who produce “theologies of marriage” and idealize “natural law,” can be explained only by the loss of ontological [i.e. the ontological primacy of personhood rather than substance] concern in theology and a consequent blindness to the reality of death.³⁶

In his view, salvation is the process of being released from obligation and necessity and into the freedom for communion. Obligation is wrapped in death. Freedom is the creation of the Spirit. This does not mean that sexual or biological reproduction is wrong or redundant but that it is now, because of Christ’s resurrection, shot through with contingency and instability. Christ

overcame death in his resurrection and created a new human being without sexual reproduction. This is why baptism is spoken of as “new birth,” and why Christ’s overcoming of death and rebirth by the Spirit makes even heterosexual marriage unstable. As Jesus hints at in his teaching on the kingdom of God, marriage will be rendered obsolete at the *parousia* because no longer will humans be tied to the biological necessity of reproduction; instead we will live in complete freedom for God and each other.³⁷ This is not to argue that heterosexual marriage is not useful or helpful, but simply that it is not pre-ordained, rooted in a divine Ideal, or somehow eternal or necessary. In the church, the sexual configuration of any relationship is secondary to the ways in which our relationships are inhabited by God’s grace and offer God’s gift to the other person.

What Zizioulas’s theology leads to is that the claim for the primacy of heterosexual marriage is actually the claim for the primacy of a biological relationship inhabited by death. To say that heterosexual marriage is somehow constitutive of true humanity is a misguided project, because God recreates the human in God’s image in Jesus, a single, celibate man. Following Zizioulas’s line of argument, we can conclude from Jesus’ singleness that sexual acts are not an intrinsic part of human personhood.

Zizioulas, Rogers, and a Non-essentialist Reading of Paul

We now must return to Rom. 1:18-32 and consider how we might integrate the theological visions of Zizioulas and Rogers with Paul’s apparent condemnation of homosexuality as idolatry. My proposal is that we can still take Paul’s argument seriously and treat the Bible authoritatively, but also open up the possibility for same-sex marriage in the church.

My starting place is to criticize the view that Paul in Rom. 1:18-32 forever condemns homosexual behavior. This view mistakenly privileges him with some kind of special knowledge or insight into reality that transcends his creaturely position. In this framework, we must ultimately posit that God has granted him a certain wisdom that allowed him to grasp the truth that marriage is for all time heterosexual in nature. However, ascribing to Paul an insight that exceeds his temporally and culturally limited (creaturely) existence lands us in an impossible situation with respect to inspiration. While I do not deny that divine guidance plays an important role, it does

not consist in granting the authors of the Bible the ability to transcend their social, cultural, and temporal existence. The Bible's power consists of the fact that through these limitations it grants truth.

If we privilege Paul with supra-human insight into "God's eternal design for marriage," then it becomes difficult not to accept all of his ordering of relational forms as absolute – including the need for women to have their heads covered, the impropriety of female leadership in the church, and the acceptability of Christian ownership of slaves. If we take this approach to Paul, we end up in irresolvable debates about which relational orderings are normative and which are culturally bound, and we lose any ground from which to critique any or all of these relational orderings as contingent realities subject to God's redemptive recreation.

A better way forward is to assert that Paul had a firm grasp of his human limitations instead of privileging him with super-human insight. We can then focus on his main point in Romans 1 and 2 as I developed it above, namely that he is making the audacious claim that what God is doing in Jesus Christ is extending covenant membership to the Gentiles as an act of gracious choice even though this process runs contrary to nature and destabilizes Jewish claims to superiority. Abstracted from its context, Rom. 1:18-32 lacks the theological weight to do much work. A more compelling (and a more straightforward) reading of this passage is to read it in concert with Romans 2 and with Paul's larger deconstruction of sinful human pride, which presumes to take the place of God as judge and decide who is "naturally" a member of the elect.

With this approach, we reach a very different conclusion with regard to Rom. 1:18-32 and same-sex marriage. That is, as humans we cannot make *a priori* judgments as to the rightness and wrongness of certain marital configurations. Paul argues in Romans 1 and 2 that Jews cannot presume to know that the depraved Gentile lifestyle is a barrier which God's grace cannot overcome. In light of this understanding of Paul, we see there are no determinative realities and no forms of relationship within which we can enact the precise character of the Christian life. Paul argues that because of Jesus Christ, even Gentile lifestyles can receive redemption, reconfiguration, and inclusion through God's grace. Similarly, in and of themselves, heterosexual and homosexual relationships are not excluded

but can receive redemption by grace. No particular way of living has the eternal stamp of rightness. This means that the form of a marriage does not in advance determine it as right or wrong. All marriages – homosexual or heterosexual – can participate in the divine life. And all marriages, in spite of occupying the “proper” form, can be downright demonic.

What I am suggesting is that we move away from essentialist readings of Paul and towards an understanding of his thought which asserts that Christian identity is found not in the particular social or relational form we inhabit but rather in the radical rebirth we share with all Christians through our baptism and participation in the church. I wish to flee, as David Nixon says, “from all essentialist ideas into shared notions of baptismal identity,” and thus return to the radically pneumatological character of ecclesial existence.³⁸

A Pneumatological Ecclesiology

With this reconsideration of Paul’s argument in Romans 1 combined with the contributions of Zizioulas and Rogers, I return to the CCMBC statements in order to begin thinking about how we might go about constructing a denominational position on this issue. The CCMBC position is clearly attempting to fix one relational form – heterosexual marriage – as *the* divinely mandated marital form. There is plainly an appeal to a predetermined reality, supposedly revealed by Scripture, where same-sex marriage is *a priori* excluded. However, it was the observation that Gentiles had received the Spirit of God without giving up their essentially Gentile ways which led Paul to conclude that God shows no partiality.³⁹ If we appreciate our place as Gentiles with respect to Israel, we are led into a position of humility with regard to our status. As Rogers points out, we worship a strange God, a God who belongs to another people. Only through the body of Jesus (i.e., through the Chalcedonian union of God and the human) are we elected to salvation. We are naturally creatures subject to God’s wrath, and only by God’s unnatural grace are we brought into relationship with God. To argue, as the CCMBC position does, that homosexual marriage is “unnatural” and thus cannot be inhabited by God’s grace forgets the unnatural position we occupy as Gentiles with respect to God. At the end of the day, the goodness of our relationships derives from the Holy Spirit’s inhabitation of them through grace, not from their embodiment of the properly prescribed forms.

Rogers puts a basic fact before us: Today, homosexuals are joining the church and enacting the covenant of Christian marriage as same-sex couples. If we combine this fact with the notion that there are no eternally fixed ideal relational forms, then the obvious conclusion is that God is incorporating homosexual unions into the covenant of Christian marriage. If we remain open to the surprising work of the Spirit, we are forced to recognize that God is able to work within all kinds of relationships – heterosexual marriages, same-sex marriages, in celibate individuals, and in nonsexually intimate relationships.

Pressing further (and borrowing from Zizioulas), I contend that many evangelical approaches to marriage fail to adequately appreciate our creaturely position. An understanding of our creaturely existence helps us realize that all supposed divinely mandated relational forms are in fact created in and inhabited by instability, contingency, and weakness. Because of this, all our human relationships are contingent and have the potential to be deeply flawed. Thus, there is nothing *inherently* good in a heterosexual marriage; a marriage becomes good through God's gracious action in that particular relationship. It is also true that any marital form can be just as demonic as any other. In my view, marriage derives its good externally, from God, and thus does not require a preordained form, heterosexual or homosexual, to receive God's grace.

The CCMBC statement that the union of two distinct genders expresses "something" (presumably something significant) about the image of God suffers from a shortcoming common in many theological approaches to marriage. Stated succinctly, it is that any vision where heterosexual unions create (even something of) the image of God possesses the major drawback that in the NT it is not male and female that constitute the image of God, but rather the God-Man. The union of God and the human in Jesus Christ is constitutive of the new image of God into which we are being conformed. And, if Christ is constitutive of the human, then marriage is not. This allows us, as Christians, to remove gender from our definition of marriage, and to see it instead as the union of two persons in a faithful and permanent relationship that is expressive of the covenant unity of God with Israel and Christ with the church.

An Ecclesiology Open to Same-Sex Marriage

Up to this point, I have not pressed deeply into the question of ecclesiology and its relationship to same-sex marriage. After a brief discussion of Zizioulas's concept of the church as a pneumatological creation, I will explore the implications of this idea for a conception of the church that is open to same-sex marriages.

Zizioulas's appreciation for the work of the Spirit makes him wary of theological positions that rely too heavily on an abstract form of revelation.⁴⁰ While he does not discount the importance of revelation, he is critical of those who allow it to dominate at the expense of an emphasis on the real presence of the Holy Spirit in creation. As he says, "If we make *revelation* the decisive notion in theology . . . Christology dominates pneumatology."⁴¹ Instead, he returns to the insistence that

... the creation cannot survive if it is self-centered and autonomous, and that the only way for it to [experience redemption]... is through communion with the uncreated. This communion is the work of the Holy Spirit, who becomes in this way life-giving....⁴²

For Zizioulas, the Spirit constitutes the church as "the communion of saints" and "the new creation." This point is made powerfully by the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 and the prophetic vision of the coming of the Spirit in the book of Joel.⁴³ Therefore, while not discounting the important role of the revelation of Jesus Christ, Zizioulas pushes us to consider the Spirit as an equal partner in our theological imaginings of the church. The presence of the Spirit in the church, in Zizioulas's view, is inherently disruptive, creating an unnatural communion between Jew and Greek; male and female; slave and free; and created humanity with the uncreated God.⁴⁴

Zizioulas articulates a pneumatological ecclesiology, and while he is not explicitly dealing with the place of same-sex marriages in the church, his conclusions mesh with those of Rogers regarding the place of gays and lesbians. Zizioulas's findings also rub up against policies that exclude "practicing" homosexuals from church membership. By pressing the role of the Holy Spirit in the constitution and character of the church, we are encouraged to imagine the possibility that God's grafting of gay and lesbian relationships onto heterosexual ones might constitute another Pentecost-like

event in the church's life. As we saw above, a strong focus on Christology radically destabilizes all human attempts at attaching "God's will" to certain relational forms. And, if we add to that a strong emphasis on pneumatology, it allows us to look for God's work in surprising and unanticipated ways. This leads to what I view as a superior Christian affirmation of marriage, that is, as a celebration in the community of saints of the exclusive and permanent joining together of two people in the deep communion made possible by the presence of Spirit.

Implications of a Pneumatological Ecclesiology

Complementarian arguments in favor of heterosexual marriage inevitably create the categories of a male and female essence and run into a fundamental problem faced by all attempts to ontologize gender. Mary Elise Lowe explains:

[They] fail to acknowledge the way subjects actually are. Human subjects are relationally, linguistically [and] socially constituted. The resulting moral problem ... is that the Cartesian subject can only treat other persons as objects. In addition, when it is assumed that the subject is autonomous, then qualities, essences, or behaviors (such as gender or sin) can be – and usually are – attributed ontologically to the subject.⁴⁵

Thus, when opposite-sex desire and heterosexual marriage are essentialized into a definition of gender and proper relationships, then homosexuals become differentiated as separate from heterosexual humanity, and same-sex marriage becomes a different species of partnering. Homosexual people can easily be turned into a separate category of humans who suffer from a psychological or biological disease, and same-sex marriage can become a form of relationship that threatens to unravel the whole society. However, as argued above, the pneumatological character of the church and our inclusion in it through baptism radically undermines any human categorization of various people. We cannot beforehand require that people embody a particular form of gender or sexual identity prior to becoming or continuing as members of the church. Rather, through baptism by the Spirit and in the church we are slowly being rebuilt into a shared identity in Christ.

Summary and Conclusions

In this article, I have drawn from rich theological language to present an understanding of Christian marriage that includes homosexual and heterosexual relationships. A definition of marriage, in order to be Christian, cannot categorically exclude all same-sex relationships. Many evangelical denominations cite Paul's arguments in Rom 1:18-32 as "proof" that homosexual behavior is not compatible with a Christian lifestyle. In order to deal with this objection, I have advanced a reading that challenges those who see this section of Romans as an enduring condemnation of all homosexual behavior. In particular, I contend that we must cease from attaching so-called "arguments from creation" to appropriate Paul's ideas. Instead, Rom. 1:18-32 is best grasped by locating it in the context of the broad sweep of an argument against all attempts to categorize people on the basis of natural or self-evident characteristics. In Paul's situation, Jews saw Gentiles as obviously depraved and beyond redemption; the only way they could ever become members of the people of God was to loose their "Gentile-ness." However, Paul breaks down these categories and names all humans as equally candidates for God's grace.

The work of Eugene Rogers helps us appreciate the paradoxical manner in which Paul employs the categories of natural and unnatural within the book of Romans. Rogers approaches him as an ingenious rhetorician who is out to undermine essentialist definitions of Jew and Gentile, not as someone who dispenses metaphysical truths about the eternal order of things. In his view, inhabiting the tension between the natural and unnatural and relating it to the categories of Jew and Gentile, we are forced to challenge the assertion that heterosexual relationships are right because they are natural. Gentile exclusion from the promise was also the natural position, until God decided to go against what was natural and engraft the Gentiles into the covenant without requiring circumcision or Torah observance.

With regard to homosexuality, this has clear implications for the church. Foremost is that the union of Jew and Gentile in the church shows that God is able to destroy what is natural and normal and recreate it in the communion of the saints.⁴⁶ Therefore, for any church, neither the category of "homosexual" nor participation in the "homosexual lifestyle" can function as a barrier to God's grace. God can freely choose to include both

gay and straight as recipients of grace and members of the church. In terms of Christian marriage, many evangelical groups define it in idealistic terms – its proper, heterosexual form is thought to exist in a divinely constituted order. But, just as in natural terms Jew and Gentile are mutually exclusive categories, so too are heterosexual and homosexual marriages. In the Spirit, same-sex marriage takes on new meaning in light of God's action in Jesus Christ. The real evaluation of Christian marriage is not through some ethereal realm of hetero- or homosexual but through its concrete display between real people. If we reject an essentialist approach, then we cannot so quickly dismiss same-sex marriage. If an *a priori* argument against same-sex marriage cannot be advanced, then we are forced to deal with real Christians who are covenanting to live with another in Christ-like love and faithfulness, even though they both have the same gender. Based on this pneumatological phenomenon, I can see no basis for the exclusion of same-sex marriages.

John Zizioulas's work on personhood, being, and creaturely location thwarts any attempt to locate our primary identity in our sexual or gender orientation; our identity is found only in relationship with Jesus Christ in the church. As Christians, we cannot prescribe the proper form of marriage in the abstract by appealing to inherent gender characteristics. All relational forms (including sexual orientations) are contingent realities, subject to disruption by the Spirit. Among other things, this means that we theologically affirm the divine, re-creative power of the Spirit which overturns the necessity of biologically reproductive relationships. Sexual reproduction cannot create the people of God. In the NT, the reproduction of the church is a pneumatological process, not a biological one. The church reproduces through the adoption and inclusion of people into the community through Christ. As the gospel of John puts it, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."⁴⁷

Our identity as men and women, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, derives from our relationship to Christ. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that marriage is not necessary (i.e., singleness and celibacy are ways to experience the fullness of God) and that marriage does not require

opposite-gender partnering. Contrary to many conservative interpreters, I believe that we can affirm, with Biblical and theological integrity, same-sex marriage in the church.

It is hard to imagine evangelical denominations changing their position on same-sex behavior. Many of these churches have made their position a question of Christian orthodoxy. However, the church is never limited by our human imaginings. Haunting our human attempts to define what is “real” – indeed haunting all our creaturely existence – is the body of Jesus. It is the common confession of all churches that this ugly, scarred, bloodied, and crucified Jewish body contains within it, by the power of the Spirit, our salvation. As Gentiles, our inclusion into Christ’s body is a radical act of God’s grace. Christians are called to continually reflect, under the guidance of the Spirit, on the profound reality that God chose what is despised to bring righteousness, redemption, and sanctification. In NT terms, salvation is an act that surpasses what is naturally possible. This calls us to affirm the possibility that God can inhabit even something as despised as same-sex marriage through the mysterious inner workings of grace.

Notes

¹ According to Mennonite World Conference statistics, in 2006 the CCMBC had 35,770 members and 246 congregations [1]. In comparison, Mennonite Church Canada had 34,000 members (in 2006) [1], the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada had 66,700 members, the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, 66,300, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada 369,500 (in 2001) [2]. Sources: [1] Mennonite World Conference Member Directory (2006) available at “<http://www.mwc-cmm.org/>” [2] Statistics Canada, “2001 Census of Canada: analysis series, Religion in Canada.” (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada), catalogue no. 96F0030XIE2001015.

² General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, *Confession of Faith of the United States and Canadian Conferences of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1999 Edition* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 1999), articles 10 and 11.

³ Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life, “Homosexuality: A Compassionate yet Firm Response,” Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Conference Board of Faith and Life, 25 November 2008).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Others, such as Richard Hays, follow this logic. Hays states that homosexual practice is wrong because the Bible unequivocally declares that “marriage between a man and a woman is the normative form for human sexual fulfillment, and homosexuality is one among many

tragic signs that we are a broken people, alienated from God's loving purpose." – Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

⁶ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Gender--Being It or Doing It? The Church, Homosexuality, and the Politics of Identity," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 47 (1993): 33.

⁷ Genesis 3:5.

⁸ The CCMBC pamphlet states, "All humans have a strong need for intimacy. But though sexual intercourse expresses a part of that need, it is not necessary for intimacy. Therefore, sexual intercourse is not open to all – it is reserved for marriage. Because we are made in the image of God, it is possible to live full, rich lives without expressing our need for intimacy through sexual intercourse." How this squares with the image of God being "more fully" expressed in the male/female union is never addressed.

⁹ This passage has a long history of interpretation. One dominant line can be traced back to Aquinas and the subsequent tradition of arguments from natural law. Commenting on Rom. 2:14, he says, "Although they [the Gentiles] have no written law, yet they have the natural law, whereby each one knows, and is conscious of, what is good and what is evil," Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 91, Obj. 3*.

However, this is not to dismiss the law, in Lutheran fashion, as simply proof that we cannot obey God's commands. Luther took the argument in a radically different direction, pitting natural law against grace. He claimed that the inability of the Gentiles to follow natural law revealed the impossibility of knowing God's laws (i.e., God's true law is completely foreign to human beings). As Luther says in his commentary on Romans, "God certainly desires to save us not through our own righteousness, but through the righteousness and wisdom of someone else or by means of a righteousness, which does not originate on earth, but comes down from heaven. So, then, we must teach a righteousness which in every way comes from without and is entirely foreign to us." Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 27-28.

In Thomas's view, while the Gentiles can know the natural law, they cannot follow it because no one, without the power of divine grace, can follow God's law, natural or not. Unless the law is infused with God's grace, it will remain ineffective and the Gentiles will go about their idolatrous ways. "According to the Romans Commentary, natural law moves human beings not one step closer to right action – unless it is restored by grace.... the Christian paradox is that natural law does not, in the concrete world of God's creation, work by nature alone.... Aquinas does not imagine natural law operating Protestant-fashion as a rival to grace; he imagines natural law as shot through with grace if it is to function at all." – Eugene F. Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 105-106.

Karl Barth does not even bring up homosexual behavior when commenting on Romans 1. "Wherever the qualitative distinction between men and the final Omega is overlooked and misunderstood, that fetishism is bound to appear in which God is experienced in 'birds and four footed things', and finally, or rather primarily, in 'the likeness of corruptible man' – Personality, the Child, the Woman – and in the half-spiritual, half-material creations,

exhibitions, and representations of man's creative ability – Family, Nation, State, Church, Fatherland.” – Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* trans. E.C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), 50-51. In the 8000+ pages of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth discusses homosexuality only once. See his *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation, Volume III/4*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 166.

¹⁰ Rom. 1:26. Dale B. Martin argues that this phrase is more aptly translated “beyond nature.” To Martin, “contrary” implies that the ancients had differentiated between natural (heterosexual) desire and unnatural (homosexual) desire. In his view this is an anachronism. The ancients did not view homosexual desire and/or practice as unnatural but as the consequence of excessive desire. I am inclined to agree but have left “contrary” in place, as it is used in most translations. “Beyond” seems also a better translation of Rom. 11:24 where the “grafting in” of the Gentiles would thus be God going beyond what is prudent to bring them in. This would make better sense of the parallelism with Rom. 1. Gentiles have an excess of desire, so they search for new experiences as outlets for it. Similarly, God has an excess of desire, which finally culminated in Christ, whose desire reached across the limits of prudence to include the Gentiles. Eugene Rogers makes this point and I emphasize it in this article. See Dale B. Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 3 (1995): 339-44.

¹¹ The OT does take up homosexuality in particular in two passages from Leviticus (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), which invoke the language of “detestable behavior.” Hays has a concise summary of the OT passages in *The Moral Vision*, 381-82. 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 are frequently employed in this debate as they purportedly appear to classify those engaging in homosexual acts as lawless, disobedient evildoers. Hays argues that the two Greek terms used to describe homosexual sex acts can be defined as follows: *malakoi* refers to those taking the passive role, often young boys; *arsenokoitai*, a neologism, was coined from the Septuagint phrase for homosexual acts committed by men. He further contends that with respect to 1 Corinthians, “This is not a controversial point in Paul’s argument; the letter gives no evidence that anyone at Corinth was arguing for the acceptance of same-sex erotic activity. Paul simply assumes that his readers will share his conviction that those who indulge in homosexual activity are ‘wrongdoers’.” – Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 382. This is the same point that I (along with Hays) argue that Paul is proposing in Rom. 1:18ff.

¹² David Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics* (London; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), 251.

¹³ Ibid. (Emphasis in original.)

¹⁴ Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 387 (emphasis mine). Dale Martin disagrees that Paul is appealing to creation-order arguments, but is instead referring to prevailing Jewish decline narratives that are not related to Genesis 2 and 3. See Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” 334-39.

¹⁵ Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 250.

¹⁶ Hays, *The Moral Vision*, 398.

¹⁷ Romans 3:23; 11:36.

¹⁸ In a review of Rogers’s book, Gilbert Meilaender says “There is something a little bizarre

about attempting to use one of the most difficult and obscure theological questions—the relation of Jews and Gentiles—to clarify the Church’s judgment about homosexual behavior, but the move is not uncommon....” Gilbert Meilaender, “What Sex Is—and Is For,” *First Things* (2000): 2. His argumentative technique here is hardly sophisticated. He simply dismisses Rogers’s ideas as “bizarre.” To state that the central motif of the Pauline letters – the relationship of Jews and Gentiles – is difficult to understand is one thing, but to say it is obscure is another. Paul’s view on the baptism of the dead could be classified as both difficult and obscure, but hardly his thoughts on Jews and Gentiles, which occupy significant portions of Romans and Galatians.

¹⁹ Acts 15:12.

²⁰ I interpret the rootstock in Paul’s use here as God’s covenant, best represented by the person of Jesus Christ. Many have questioned whether Paul was confused about oliculture, for it seems most logical to graft a domestic shoot onto a wild rootstock. I don’t think Paul was confused; he has instead intentionally reversed the image. As Philip Francis Esler says, “Paul may have diverged from a particular agricultural practice in a way that his audience would have recognized as a deliberate tactic aimed at making a particular point.” Esler argues that the rhetorical force of this argument is that “Paul deliberately depicts the inversion of this process, as a way of undermining the pretensions of Greek Christ-followers in Rome. The result is an image of the Christ movement, clearly differentiated in its parts, in which the Judean members are superior to the others.” Philip Francis Esler, “Ancient Oliculture and Ethnic Differentiation: The Meaning of the Olive-Tree Image in Romans 11,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2003): 106. This passage fits generally with Rogers’s desire to create heterosexual humility towards homosexuals.

²¹ Rom. 11:24.

²² Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 65.

²³ Ibid., 64-65.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 11:13-15a.

²⁵ Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 65.

²⁶ Witness again the CCMBC pamphlet, which says, “A study done by researchers Bell and Weinberg reported that only 9% of homosexual males had fewer than 25 sexual partners in their lifetime. Their studies concluded that only 1% of male homosexuals had had a monogamous relationship.” The pamphlet’s authors fail to mention that the cited 1981 study suffers from serious design flaws. The sample was not drawn randomly, nor was it geographically representative. This makes it impossible to draw probabilistic inferences of the general homosexual population like those cited in the pamphlet.

A 1982 review of the study states that “it makes one realize how costly these notions [advanced by Bell and Weinberg] have been to the field, not just in the vacuousness of their main themes, but also in the promulgation of their underlying assumptions: that heterosexuality [being ‘instinctive’] can be taken for granted and thus its development need not be accounted for; that homosexuality arises from factors other than those which are also involved in heterosexuality; and, worst of all, that a preference of any kind can ever rest on a negative base. (A person likes what he likes because of its rewards, not because he hates

or fears something else.) One sees the diverting power of these underlying assumptions in the case at hand.” – C. A. Tripp, “Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Woman/ Sexual Preference: Statistical Appendix (Review of Book),” *Journal of Sex Research* 18 (1982).

For the original study see Alan P. Bell and Martin S. Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity among Men and Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978; Alan P. Bell, Martin S. Weinberg, and Sue Kiefer Hammersmith, *Sexual Preference, Its Development in Men and Women* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1981). To attempt to measure the “promiscuity level” of homosexuals is extremely complex. Obtaining a random and representative sample is difficult; people are often reticent to reveal their sexual habits to researchers and tend to misrepresent their behaviors in surveys.

²⁷ Gilbert Meilaender, with characteristic rhetorical excess, claims the dissenting positions on homosexual behavior are the divisions between “a few Protestants, on the one hand, and [all] Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox, and Catholic Christians on the other.” This is a typical conservative response – to marginalize the opposing view with inaccurate statements on the position’s popularity. Ironically, when the conservative view is in the minority it becomes a “prophetic witness against the culture of death.” See Gilbert Meilaender, “Talking Democracy,” *First Things* (2004).

²⁸ John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006).

²⁹ “Human beings create by destroying; in sexuality the human race preserves itself while it destroys.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* trans. Martin Ruter et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 122-24.

³⁰ Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 59.

³¹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 59.

³² *Ibid.*, 61.

³³ *Ibid.*, 62. Emphasis in original.

³⁴ For a deeper explanation of the connection of new birth, baptism, and personhood, see *ibid.*, 109.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 263. Emphasis mine.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁷ Matt. 22:23-30.

³⁸ David Nixon, “‘No More Tea, Vicar’. An Exploration of the Discourses Which Inform the Current Debates about Sexualities Within the Church of England,” *Sexualities* 11 (2008): 609.

³⁹ “We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (Acts 15:19-20). This concession by the Jerusalem Council clearly expects that Gentiles will experience a rebirth in Christ, which will lead to certain behavioral changes. The expected behaviors, however, are significantly less stringent than those followed by Jews (and Jewish Christians). The Gentile Christian lifestyle is still Gentile but with modifications. So, too, I am arguing that homosexuals (or

“the homosexual lifestyle” – a term I dislike because of its pejorative associations) can be Christian homosexuals by bringing their lives under the command of God. This does not mean, however, that they must become celibate or heterosexual Christians; this move would be akin to requiring Gentiles to become Jews (and follow the Jewish way of life) in order to become Christians.

⁴⁰ There is a strong resonance between what Zizioulas is arguing for and a Reformed position. Zizioulas still retains a Calvinist and Barthian aversion to natural theology. One can hear echoes of *The Institutes* when he says, “The observation of the world cannot lead to an ontology of the person, because the person as an ontological category cannot be extrapolated from experience” (Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 103).

⁴¹ Ibid., 203.

⁴² Ibid., 204.

⁴³ Acts 2:1-13; Joel 2:23-32.

⁴⁴ In other words, Gal. 3:28. I do not want to push Zizioulas so far as to create a direct correspondence between either Christ and the church or the action of the Spirit and the action of Christians. In my view, these connections are inhabited by a rupture (in Bonhoeffer’s words, an “abyss”) in which sin is, for the time being, still operative.

⁴⁵ Mary Elise Lowe, “Gay/Lesbian Ordination and the Ontology of the Human Subject,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43 (2004): 177.

⁴⁶ In my opinion, male and female as “natural divisions” suffer the same fate. In the Spirit, male and female as essentialist categories break down. We cannot call certain things as properly masculine or feminine or an embodiment of maleness or femaleness. Male and female take their meaning from their relationship with Jesus Christ, not through their inherent characteristics.

⁴⁷ John 1:12-13.

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