

Same-Gender Marriage as a Social Justice Issue: Splitting the Difference?

by Ched Myers, with Bill Wylie Kellermann (4/04)

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I. The Context

Over the last couple of months we have witnessed an extraordinary historical opening, not to mention an eruption in the public discourse, concerning the issue of same-sex marriage. A dramatic shot over the bow was the remarkable "civic civil disobedience" by the county of San Francisco, which began issuing marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples on Feb 12th, inspiring several other counties around the country to follow suit. Thousands of licenses were issued, including one to David Knight and his partner (Knight is the son of CA. Republican State Senator Pete Knight, who in 2000 authored Proposition 22, which defined marriage as being solely between a man and a woman). This breach of the heterosexual monopoly on marriage was closed exactly one month later by the California Supreme Court, which issued an interim stay directing officials to stop allowing same sex marriages until the issue can be reviewed by the courts. In the midst of the kaffuffle, President Bush announced that he would support a Constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriage.

Meanwhile, on the opposite coast, a political environment of stunning ambivalence has been shaping up, in which the State Legislature is seeking to "split the difference," banning same sex marriage while approving civil unions. The 3/31/04 Boston Globe reported the following result:

The Massachusetts Legislature voted yesterday to ban gay marriage and establish civil unions, approving a proposed constitutional amendment that would reverse the Supreme Judicial Court's historic ruling that legalized same-sex marriages. Governor Mitt Romney immediately vowed to ask the court to block gay marriages until voters can decide the fate of the dual proposal in November 2006. The SJC decision legalizing gay marriages is set to go into effect May 17, and Romney said he wanted to avoid confusion that he believes would result if gay couples married and then the voters banned gay marriage. Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly, however, said minutes later that he would not take Romney's request to the SJC. Reilly said he believed that Romney lacked a valid legal basis for a stay, because the SJC has ruled twice in favor of gay marriage. The SJC ruling would make Massachusetts the first state to allow gay couples to marry. The proposed constitutional amendment, on the other hand, would ban gay marriage but make Massachusetts the second state, after

Vermont, to legalize civil unions that would provide the same state rights and benefits available to heterosexual couples through marriage. The Legislature narrowly approved the amendment, 105-92, after the fourth intense day of debate in the past six weeks.

So the political battle is pitched, heading into presidential election season, with Republicans lining up behind an amendment, and Democrats (including candidate Kerry) mostly aping the Massachusetts Legislature's waffling doublespeak.

Clearly, this issue is not going to go away. Many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered activists (hereafter LGBT) would not have chosen the battle over marriage, or this particular moment, to define and direct their struggle for equal rights. But social movements often are decisively impacted by developments that activists did not anticipate. And indeed, as a result of recent events, it appears that same-sex marriage will be the lens through which the real issue—full equality in church and state—is viewed.

We believe this moment calls on those of us who enjoy heterosexual privilege (including marriage rights) to demonstrate an unprecedented measure of solidarity with LGBT persons, particularly sisters and brothers in the faith. This battle is not only deeply consequential for the church and nation as a whole, but also for millions of real persons trying to live and love without discrimination. This is not, as Melanie Morrison insists, merely about a "culture war"; it is a fundamental matter of human justice and liberation.

The pundits are squawking, but this issue does not lend itself to sound-bites. For this reason we offer below a few "talking points" that might help those looking for a place to stand in the shifting terrain. We have no illusions that conservatives who are ideologically committed to heterosexism will be persuaded by these arguments. Nor are they needed by those who already affirm the rights of LGBT persons to full equality. Rather, these thoughts are specifically aimed at the arguments of those who purport to offer a "middle ground" in this debate, while preserving their heterosexual monopoly on marriage—usually for vague cultural and/or religious reasons. It is the kind of remarkably fuzzy thinking that has led to Massachusetts double-dealing.

This position imagines it can not only split the difference between marriage and civil unions, but also split off those who are "different," excepting the LGBT community from the logic of civil rights as it has been embodied in decades of struggle in this country. Such equivocation is, sadly, attractive to many who have not wrestled through the issue, or who are insulated from its consequences. This is why we believe that persons of faith and democratic conviction must clearly support the legitimate demand of the LGBT community to finally be welcomed as full members of

church and society. And why we have oriented these theological and political comments toward those who “hedge” about whether this truly is a justice issue.

We wish to acknowledge up front that reasoning alone does not do justice to the real suffering and hopes of those whose lives hang in the balance on these public debates. Indeed, we believe that relationships with LGBT folk are ultimately far more persuasive than mere arguments in helping heterosexual persons and groups to clarify their thinking and feeling on this issue. Still, because we have been getting requests for some perspective, we hope the following might be useful. We are grateful to Melanie Morrison, a lesbian UCC minister and director of the Leaven Center in Michigan, for her help in thinking through these concerns.

II. Is the Bible any help on this issue?

We ask this not because of our lack of confidence in the scriptures, but in recognition that when it comes to reading the biblical material regarding LGBT issues, the terrain is highly conflicted, as are all the hermeneutical angles. We won't attempt to address this well worked-over ground here; all the basic arguments on both sides (including mine) have been made elsewhere with varying depth and breadth. We'll simply make a few brief assertions about our own biblical convictions (and we are happy to provide background to how we arrived at them for the interested reader).

1. Of all the traditions in the Hebrew Bible, the Levitical codes appear to be pretty hard on homosexuality. It can certainly be argued that these codes should not be held to be “normative” for contemporary Christian ethics, since there is much in the Purity Code that has been set aside or rejected (we recommend a funny yet thoughtful parody on the web). But we always worry that such an approach easily degenerates into a Marcionist tendency (i.e. Christian liberals impugning the Old Testament and taking refuge in the New). We think instead we ought to read Torah through the lens of the prophetic tradition (in somewhat the same way Christians read the Hebrew Bible through the lens of Jesus' life and death). And the prophetic tradition is clear that we are to practice compassion with vulnerable members of the community.

Moreover, the prophets envisioned an ever-widening circle of communion. Melanie Morrison, for example, has shown that Isaiah 56 anticipates a time when despised sexual minorities such as eunuchs “who join themselves to the Lord” would be welcomed in the “house of the Lord.” The fact that Jesus cites this very oracle in his dramatic Temple action (Mk 11:17) suggests that it was a vision that deeply shaped his struggle with the leaders of his own tradition around issues of exclusion.

2. The N.T. says little, and perhaps nothing at all, about “normal” same-sex relationships (that is, non cultic or ritual homosexual relations). But we do not therefore believe that we need to rely on a theory of “progressive revelation” to construct a rationale for the inclusion of the LGBT community. Rather, we think this can and should be constructed on the basis of socio-historical analogy. The reasoning goes something like this:
 - a. Jesus explicitly called disciples to practice communion and solidarity with “the least,” the despised and the excluded in his social context (e.g. Mk 9:33-37, 10:43-45; Mt 25:31-46), and demonstrated this in his intimate social relationships with and advocacy for lepers, women, the unclean, the disabled, the demon-possessed, non-Jews, etc.
 - b. this call applies in any social or historical context, but the nature of the marginalized groups changes with the context, since cultural perceptions and the distribution of power changes through time and space;
 - c. sexual minorities today unarguably qualify as a structurally marginalized group, whether that is defined in terms of civil rights, general social acceptance or physical or psychological victimization.
3. For majority heterosexual Christians, we think the text that most clearly forbids any theological attempt to scapegoat, exclude or demonize the LGBT community is Jesus’ teaching that “nothing from the outside can make us unclean” (Mk 7). While a dominant culture (the “insiders”) may have the power to name minority cultures as “outsiders,” according to Jesus the latter does not have the power to harm or compromise the character of the former. The insiders’ own behavior alone determines its character. This is a profound and deeply germane principle of communal and public ethics in the present debate.
4. Finally, any sort of categorical (e.g. “all homosexuals”) exclusion or segregation functions to reconstruct the very “wall of hostility” that Christ’s death tore down, as classically articulated in Ephesians 2. Such a theological position undermines the Christological mission to:
 - a. welcome into the community those who “insiders” may have categorized as “aliens and strangers” (Eph 2:11f);
 - b. bring close those perceived as “far off” (2:13);
 - c. abolish any “laws and traditions” that separate us in order to “create one new humanity, and thus make peace” (2:15), thereby reconciling a reconciled community to God (2:16).

Any theological position that differentiates persons or groups on the basis of an anthropological trait is deeply problematic. Because of centuries of social struggle in church and society, we no longer accept such differentiation in the case of gender or skin color/ethnicity, nor do

we any longer accept biblical rationales for such (despite the fact that these were considered “orthodox” in former epochs). On what grounds, then, do we accept it in the case of sexual orientation? We can find no biblical or theological justification for relegating an entire social group to a different “class” of citizenship in both church and society.

5. For those interested in navigating the voluminous literature, let me make just a few suggestions about generally reliable resources that are easily accessible:
 - a. Walter Wink’s brief overview “Homosexuality and the Bible”;
 - b. A long, thoughtful essay by evangelical theologian Jack Rogers, who changed his mind as a result of reassessing the biblical testimony;
 - c. Latin American liberation theologian Tom Hanks has written widely on this question;
 - d. Jeff Miner and John Connoley’s popular *The Children Are Free: Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-sex Relationships* (Jesus Metropolitan Community Church, 2002) can be previewed;
 - e. Three recent “fora” featuring thoughtful biblical scholars with differing viewpoints and approaches can be found in:
 - i. David Balch (ed), *Homosexuality, Science, and the 'Plain Sense' of Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2000);
 - ii. Dan Via and R. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible : Two Views* (Fortress Press, 2003); and
 - iii. an exchange between William Herzog III and Manfred Brauch found at
 - f. One of the most exhaustive annotated bibliographies of the Bible and homosexuality we've found on line was compiled by Jeramy Townsley:

In short, the Bible can and must be our ally in the current struggle, but we must be clear that any attempt to employ it in solidarity is subject to becoming mired in the dizzying labyrinth of contested interpretations (of the Right and the Left). Though no particular readings are conclusive (nor in fact can they be in a living tradition), it is important not concede a “draw” in the hermeneutical battles. We must continue to read the “Word Out” (as Chris Glaser would put it), while always mindful of the hateful ways in which the scriptures have been placed in the service of exclusion. The sheer weight of that legacy should bow us, but not break us.

III. Civil rights, ecclesial wrongs

The platform that is emerging among those who profess to be “moderates” on same-sex marriage argues that society’s extension of “civil and human rights” to the LGBT community should be affirmed, but that the “traditional” position of the church (or the political culture) needs no paradigm shift.

The logic that bifurcates “civil” and “ecclesial” rights has long been familiar as the position of the Roman Catholic Church regarding women and the priesthood. That is, it’s OK for women to fully participate in society, just not in the ministry of the Church. The problem is not that this position posits a fundamental difference between matters of church and matters of state; American citizens and Christian disciples should both affirm this distinction, if for different reasons. Citizens, for example, have an interest in constraining the ability of any one religious group to impose its beliefs or practices; and Christians have an interest in constraining the ability of the State to limit their discipleship practices.

The problem is how this distinction intersects with basic human rights. It is true that American society will always be more pluralistic than the American church—indeed, than any particular community of conviction and practice. But the issue with same sex marriage (like with women in the Catholic Church) is one of discrimination, not pluralism. How can Christians call with integrity for non-discrimination in civil society if we reserve the right to discriminate in our churches?

The closest parallel that comes to mind is the way in which many Southern white churches during the Civil Rights era contended that even if civil society mandated integration, they would never allow “race mixing” in their churches. Their argument was that churches were “private” institutions based on religious values and traditions that the State should not meddle with. Koinonia Farms founder Clarence Jordan battled with several Southern Baptist congregations in Georgia concerning precisely this logic, which he contended was as a betrayal of the gospel. Today some Christians would work within that same framework on the issue of same-sex marriage, insisting that even if the State sanctions it, the church should not. (For a thoughtful but finally failed argument for the moderate position on the grounds of religious freedom, see Misty Irons’ “A Conservative Christian Case for Civil Same-Sex Marriage”).

Such thinking betrays the church’s vocation to be a leader in the struggle for human liberation, and diminishes its character by stipulating that not all hard-won civil rights should apply in its special moral universe. It seems to me that Christians should advocate for an ecclesiology that stipulates exactly the opposite—namely, that the church should embrace marginalized persons and groups regardless of what the dominant culture says.

This raises the real issue, which is how LGBT folk are treated in the community of faith. Obviously there are many churches that refuse any sort of communion with “avowed, practicing homosexuals.” Many others simply ignore them or render them invisible (“don’t ask, don’t tell” was the functional policy in many churches long

before the Clinton administration adopted it for the military!). Then there are churches that support “almost full” inclusion—LGBT members have access to every sacrament except marriage. In this case, a separate, non-marital “commitment status” with special liturgical ceremonies has been developed, in some cases in defiance of ecclesial hierarchies.

Yet these special services, if they do not constitute a “real marriage,” simply reproduce the aforementioned logic of the Vatican regarding women: equal status except for what’s most sacred. Moreover, supporting same-sex “unions”(civil or religious) is disingenuous unless it also advocates for equal access to all the structures of communal, sacramental and civil support that any couple needs to live out their fidelity to one another. (We are setting aside here the thorny theological issue of what the relationship between the church and State should be in the sanctioning of marriage). Of course, heterosexuals have amply demonstrated that marriage laws and customs do not guarantee fidelity or “healthy families.” And in the absence of civil or religious support, LGBT folk have long been inventing such structures on their own. It is simply a matter of equal opportunity.

Conservative logic here is particularly duplicitous. Not to support same-sex marriage is to leave the LGBT community orphaned on the very issue conservatives claim to value most, namely “committed relationships” and strong families. This has led to the traditional, vicious and circular reasoning that uses stereotypes of LGBT promiscuity to deny them the very social supports that help couples resist promiscuity! Opposing this contradiction, David Brooks wrote recently in the New York Times in support of same-sex marriage: “Faced with the contemporary marriage crisis, we conservatives should do everything in our power to move as many people as possible from the path of contingency to the path of fidelity.”

But quite apart from ecclesial equivocation, the secondary status of civil unions for LGBT citizens is incoherent from a rights perspective. If civil unions do offer all the legal privileges and protections equivalent to those provided by State-sanctioned marriage, why would the State bother with the distinction? If civil unions do not offer everything that obtains to marriage, on the other hand, then they do not constitute full civil rights. This is precisely the position of the county of San Francisco: the State Constitution declares that “a person may not be...denied equal protection of the laws.” (The upcoming State Supreme court deliberation on this matter will be interesting: twice in 25 years it has ruled that the State Constitution protects homosexuals against discrimination, yet six years ago ruled that the Boy Scouts could legally exclude gays!)

Meanwhile, of course, a proposed federal Constitutional amendment precluding same-sex marriage, supported by powerful Conservatives such as Robert Bork and

George Bush, is gaining momentum. Predictably, it is gaining widespread support from the religious Right. Regrettably, there is also considerable support from the Black church—perplexing in that such an amendment would represent a return to the bad old days of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, when federal law was used to restrict rather than to expand civil rights.

(Apropos, Black Conservative Shelby Steele has made a desperate attempt to “split off” the LGBT community from the civil rights legacy: “Gay marriage is...not a struggle for freedom. It is a struggle of already free people for complete social acceptance.” He then goes on to make the extraordinarily ridiculous claim that “racism was evil because it projected a profound difference where there was none—white supremacy, black inferiority—for the sole purpose of exploiting blacks. But there is a profound difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality.” Apparently Steele has forgotten the elaborate ideological justifications for anthropological difference that characterized most of the history of race relations in America; or the fact that biological difference has continued to be the rationale for gender discrimination right up to the present.)

Most “moderates” (though not in Massachusetts) will likely reject the strategy of a Constitutional amendment as too problematic to the tradition of rights. (“How wise do you think it is to put into the US Constitution, asks Art Waskow, the view held by some religious communities -- but not all -- that God forbids or frowns on same-sex sexuality?”) But they are still missing the point. The great thing about Civil Rights logic, as it has been embodied in both social movements and most legal precedents in this country over the last half century, is that the struggle for some rights inevitably expands into a struggle for equal rights. Moreover, full rights are envisioned for all minorities, not just some—no matter how small a percentage of the population (LGBT persons are more numerous than Native Americans or Koreans, but should that even matter?). If any exceptions are to be made to equal rights, according to this logic, they should be in the area of “affirmative action” programs that would support the minority group having to navigate hostile social structures.

IV. Deconstructing slippery appeals to “tradition”

In the absence of firmer grounds, proponents of the exclusivity of heterosexual marriage often make highly charged, if vague, appeals to “tradition” to justify their position. This invocation is basic to the Right’s cosmology and rhetoric, and when unchallenged tends to be very persuasive in the public discourse, particularly to “moderates” who haven’t really thought through the issue. After all, when the matter is framed in a way that suggests that same-sex marriage is messing with a nearly cosmic and sacred tradition, few wish to take it on. But it is completely specious once we scratch the surface of the argument.

Tradition is another name for a canonized majority practice. While it is important to reckon with culturally, it should not be equated with a universal anthropological phenomenon, though it often is in the present debate. Majority “norms” in any given cultural arrangement are always socially constructed; “customary” behavior is always historically relative. Even in the case of the biblical injunction that a “man leave his parents to cleave to a woman” (Gen 2:24), the ways in which this “divine institution” is actually expressed in the Bible vary greatly. Many of these cultural forms of “marriage” (concubinage, Levirate marriage, virginity laws, etc.) would be objectionable from the perspective of the modern marital model.

Sociologically speaking, our “normative” paradigm for marriage and family is no older than six generations, dating from the Victorian era. It certainly bears no resemblance to kinship structures in biblical times, nor is it recognizable to cultural practices that have prevailed through most of church history. Louie Crew has pointed out, for example, that:

- For most of the Christian era, weddings were not held in churches;
- The formalities were much more about property than about affection and mutuality;
- The vast majority of people had common law marriages, as there was no real property; as late as the 16th century, Austria and Bavaria had laws banning marriage for servants and day laborers;
- Adultery, not marriage, was the norm of the Courtly Love tradition in the High Middle Ages;
- Marriage services, when they did evolve in the 12th-14th century, were modeled on monastic ceremonies that made vows of friendship.

In the American experience we could add that it was only after the civil war that Afro-Americans were allowed to marry in all areas of the US, and mixed race couples could marry anywhere in the country only after a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1967!

Indeed, our definition of family has morphed significantly just in the last two generations. It is well within living memory, for example, that divorced persons were excluded by our churches from the sacrament of (re)marriage! Those who would defend the values of marriage, then, should at least bring some measure of historical and cross-cultural analysis to the task, and stay away from sweeping generalizations. The church, for its part, should endeavor never to absolutize one cultural paradigm for marriage--particularly not one limited to the culture and history of Modernity.

Appeals to “tradition” are also problematic from the standpoint of Christian ethics. Just because something is a widespread or majority practice does not mean it is

morally justified (i.e. war, overconsumption, prejudice, usury, adultery, etc.). On the contrary, disciples endeavor to follow gospel values whether or not they are embraced by entrenched institutions. The biblical prophets and Jesus were always holding deeply-rooted "traditions" to the bar of Yahweh's justice and compassion (e.g. Is 58; Mk 7). Every movement of church renewal has challenged prevailing "norms" of church and society. And "traditions" of race, class and/or gender have often stood in the way of change in modern social justice struggles; when it comes to marriage, one thinks of the longstanding, dysfunctional traditions of misogyny and miscegenation.

Certainly Christians can affirm and support certain majority cultural practices (though it is remarkable how rarely the apostle Paul did so in his time). Today this would surely include heterosexual traditions of marriage and family, which deserve our support. After all, half of contemporary marriages fail in our cultural context, so they need our help. But support for a majority practice in no way obligates the church to absolutize them, much less to proscribe or preclude minority practices. Traditions are healthy only insofar as they are living, adapting, and open to revision.

The flip side of the argument from tradition is the specter of the alleged "threat" of same-sex marriage. The presumption (usually unstated) is of a sort of zero-sum, finite economy of fidelity: if gay folks are married, it will somehow undermine heterosexual marriage. No one can demonstrate how gay and lesbian people are responsible for the breakdown of the heterosexual family; it is pure prejudice, and vicious scapegoating.

Family breakdown is indeed a concern in our society. But family disintegration is fundamentally rooted in the structural forces of post-modern capitalism itself, which are at war with the family and all social relations of solidarity. The breakdown of kinship structures is more advanced in our society than in any other, and how we interpret this phenomenon is crucial if we are going to reverse the tide. We will never confront the way in which powerful economic forces relentlessly uproot, alienate, dislocate, commodify, and separate people if we are distracted by surrogate cultural arguments that vilify minority practices while romanticizing majority "traditions."

V. "Moderation" vs. discipleship

For years the "culture war" over issues of LGBT inclusion has been vicious, generating more heat than light. Every mainstream Protestant denomination is divided on this question, and those that have taken modest steps toward inclusion are faced with schismatic movements of reaction. This ambivalence is widespread in the culture more generally, which is why few politicians have been willing to take a clear position in support of same-sex marriage. In this highly polarized environment, some

progressive folks are concerned that the same-sex marriage issue functions will distract attention from other pressing social concerns such as militarism and poverty. Others fear that pushing this issue may lead to even more reactionary initiatives from the Right. (Polls suggest that conservatives of all stripes may well unite over this issue, and scuttle any chance of voting out the Bush administration in November.) Thus there is a certain “tactical reluctance” among many to push this issue, a sentiment shared even by some LGBT folk themselves.

Such a context makes it even more tempting to posture as a “moderate.” Many heterosexual politicians, church leaders and pundits even imagine they can arbitrate the deep differences in the current cultural and political environment through a “middle ground discourse.” The problem is, this is done without acknowledgment of the power or structural privilege they enjoy as heterosexuals, especially around issues of marriage. Worse still, these folks routinely talk about what LGBT folk “need” or “deserve,” but do not talk with them.

We believe that the issue of LGBT inclusion represents another chapter in the Civil Rights movement’s ongoing struggle for equal justice in American society. It is a crucial moment, and moderation will not do. We think the witnesses of two notable mid-20th century church leaders offer a crucial reminder here:

1. **Martin Luther King, Jr.** The struggle against racism was the primary “culture war” in the U.S. for a century and a half. King’s Birmingham jail letter, written to both white and black pastors, challenged “moderates” (i.e. those who had not taken a public stand on the controversial issues of integration in the South) to show courage and commitment in the face of popular opposition. He subsequently did the same thing regarding the Vietnam War. Today, as a result in part of two decades of effective organizing by cultural conservatives, and in part due to the traditionally conservative tendency of the great American middle, it is indeed politically risky to stand in unequivocal solidarity with those seeking the normalization of same-sex marriage. Will we take an unpopular stand, or wait until changes in social perception make it politically acceptable to join a movement for full inclusion?
2. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer.** During the rise of National Socialism in Germany, close on the heels of the first Jewish exclusion acts that were instituted by both State and church, Bonhoeffer’s sister became engaged to a Jewish man. She asked Bonhoeffer to officiate at their wedding, but he refused, judging it to be still too controversial within his own denomination, and too distracting from the other pressing issues he was trying to fight (he was, after all, the first German pastor to publicly challenge Hitler). Shortly thereafter, Bonhoeffer realized he had betrayed his own convictions and the humanity of his Jewish friends, and apologized profusely to the couple. He regretted forever after that he had

failed to see the connection between the Jewish question and the Confessing Church. He subsequently authored some powerful pieces in which he asserted that the entire Christian rationale for resistance to the Nazi Reich was predicated upon whether or not the church would stand in solidarity with the Jews. This part of his (and Niemoller's) thinking, interestingly, never did fully prevail in the Confessing Movement. Today we keep inventing new rationales for the old politics of exclusion.

These stories suggest that history is a hard judge on those who, because of political or religious "traditions" of the moment, resist the full inclusion of disparaged human communities into both church and society.

We can take heart that for all the polarization around, there are many examples of people of faith transgressing simplistic "right and left" paradigms in order to find common ground without giving up principle. There are evangelicals who are questioning the received wisdom about LGBT exclusion. And there are many compelling voices in the LGBT Christian community who are speaking strongly about (and modeling in their lives) the need for committed relationships and sexual fidelity. Both gay and straight folk are wrestling deeply and conscientiously with the whole spectrum of issues related to marriage, nurturing family, sexual ethics, etc. These kinds of voices will be more important to the public conversation than those trying to tip-toe a middle of the road path. (One group trying to construct a safe and fair conversation around this issue, including theological and biblical aspects, is Bridges Across.)

The struggle of LGBT sisters and brothers for justice and inclusion is far greater than the issue of marriage. But in this historical moment, the marriage issue is deeply consequential. It is a matter of justice and of discipleship, of integrity for the body of Christ and for the body politic. God's sacraments are a gift, and society's sanctions can be a good, and these belong to all the people.

Real persons have suffered as a result of Christians supporting (or refusing to denounce) deep-seeded prejudices in the past. But courageous voices of faith and conscience have also helped overturn these same prejudices, helping the prophetic vision of a "House for all peoples" to ever broaden its scope from generation to generation. Any of us can, in hindsight, see the exclusions of the past as "obviously" wrong. The challenge for us is to embrace the more difficult thing: foresight into the future of "liberty and justice for all."

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1).