

Fidelitas

JOURNAL OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF
CATHOLIC SCHOLARS
(CANADA)



Summer-Fall 2021

Vol. XIV No. 2 (New Series)

ISSN 1201-284X

Making Room for Siblings of the Spirit:

A Response to the *Responsum* on Blessings for Same-Sex Unions

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Introduction

On March 15, 2021, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a *responsum ad dubium* (answer to a question). This *responsum* was intended to settle definitively whether the Church has "the power to give the blessing of unions to persons of the same sex." According to the CDF, she does not.

This was predictably unpopular among those who had perceived Pope Francis as embodying a more accepting attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community-

-after all, he had previously stated his support for some legal protection for cohabiting couples, including same-sex couples.¹ These more “progressive” Catholics tended to see this declaration as being at odds with Francis’ inclusive language about gay people and displayed surprise and disappointment when it was released.² This reaction was probably unwarranted, given that the Holy Father has already expressed agreement with the Church’s teaching on homosexuality multiple times.³ Indeed, his support for legal protection for cohabitators notwithstanding, he has also criticized the institution of same-sex marriage.⁴ Admittedly, both “conservative” and “liberal” Catholics have expressed bafflement at how the Pope’s position on gay acceptance and his insistence on traditional Catholic sexual morality can co-exist.

But what was especially interesting about this responsum was that it came only a few days after the notorious provocateur and commentator Milo Yiannopoulos, who had married another man in 2017, publicly announced that, out of devotion to his

¹ "Explainer: What Pope Francis actually said about civil unions—and why it matters," Colleen Dulle, *America Magazine*, October 22, 2020.

² "Germany: Theology professors blast Vatican gay union stance," *The Associated Press*, March 23, 2021.

³ One example of this was in paragraph 251 of *Amoris Laetitia*, which in the *Responsum* itself quotes directly.

⁴ "Pope Francis suggests gay marriage threatens traditional families," Michele Richinick, MSNBC, January 17, 2015.

Catholic faith, he had consecrated himself to St. Joseph and was now leading a celibate life. His former husband, whom he now called “the guy I live with,” had been “demoted to housemate.”⁵ Their situation, as he describes it, is now that of two men who live together and are emotionally committed to one another without being sexually intimate.

The sincerity or merit of Yiannopoulos’ testimony and devotional life aside, the convergence of these two public proclamations highlights a glaring lacuna in the responsum. The text, and the argument it makes, clearly states that same-sex sexual unions cannot be blessed. It goes on to affirm that the Church can bless “individual persons with homosexual inclinations who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God as proposed by Church teaching” (emphasis added). But it never answers (or even acknowledges) the problem of whether Christ has given the Church the power to bless *chaste* same-sex companionships—that is, committed emotional partnerships between persons of the same sex which, “in fidelity to the revealed plans of God,” do not include sexual intercourse or any other form of deliberate sexual arousal.

⁵ "Activist Milo Yiannopoulos is now 'Ex-Gay,' consecrating his life to St. Joseph." Doug Mainwaring, *LifeSite News*, March 9, 2021.

A study out of the United States indicates that there are 1.3 million American Catholics who identify as LGBT.⁶ Many of them struggle with understanding how to live out the Church's teachings on sexuality. While the Christian faith requires self-denial and mortification, we are also warned not to put unnecessary stumbling blocks in the way of our brothers and sisters, and we should be faithfully open to the possibility that there are forms of spiritual care the Church could be offering this community that too many of them are not receiving.

There is an analogy between this responsum and *Humanae Vitae*. Just as many people were expecting a slackening of the restriction on contraception from Pope St. Paul VI, who was perceived as being more open to modernity, only to be disappointed when he reaffirmed the Church's traditional teaching, so we have witnessed Pope Francis of "who am I to judge?" fame (re)affirming the Church's sexual morality to the general disapproval of the world.

However, Pope St. John Paul II recognized that *Humanae Vitae* needed to be supplemented. Though it ultimately offered a positive vision of human sexuality to the world, he was also aware that "the old-

⁶ "Religiosity Among LGBT Adults in the U.S.," Kerith J. Conron, Shoshana K. Goldberg, and Kathryn O'Neill, UCLA School of Law: Williams Institute, October, 2020, page 2.

style ethics of the moral manuals...proved woefully inadequate” and had resulted in “the virtual catechetical failure of Paul VI’s encyclical.”⁷ A renewed, personalist presentation of what the Gospel has revealed about human sexuality was necessary, which JP II offered in his talks on Theology of the Body and *Donum Vitae*. JP II was effectively trying to answer the question: If not contraception, then what? This made clear what the Church was saying “yes” to, even as it said “no” to something else.

This *responsum* also requires a positive moral aspirational vision to complement its negation, which this paper will propose can be found in a restored and partially monasticized adelphopoiesis (“sibling-making”) ritual. It will also propose a different way of articulating this issue which the Magisterium could fruitfully adopt in future pronouncements which could be pastorally sensitive to the concerns of LGBTQ+ Catholics while remaining unambiguously orthodox.

The Text of the *Responsum*

The specific wording of the *dubium* the CDF responded to was, “Does the Church have the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex?” This question does not define what the

⁷ *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II’s “Gospel of the Body,”* Christopher West, Pauline Books & Media, 2003, page 48.

“unions” are being referred to actually are; neither does the *responsum*, though it does take time to define what a “sacramental” is and what a “blessing” is. We can only make inferences about what “unions” are, in this context, based on the etymology of the word—it evokes the idea of joining individuals together into one, *unus*—and the reasoning that the document uses.

In its explanation, the CDF (in the voice of its prefect, Cardinal Ladaria Ferrer, S.J.) observes that “sexual activity” is only legitimate within a certain kind of union: Marriage, “the indissoluble union between a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life.” Therefore, “it is not licit to impart a blessing on relationships, or partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage...as is the case of the unions between persons of the same sex.” Even though these relationships may contain “positive elements, which are in themselves to be valued and appreciated,” they are still “not ordered to the Creator’s plan.”

Which unions is the Church empowered by Christ to bless? The *responsum* explains that only relationships that are “objectively and positively ordered to receive and express grace, according to the designs of God inscribed in creation, and fully revealed by Christ the Lord” can be blessed.

What we gather from this is that this *responsum* takes for granted that the unions it is talking about involve sexual activity. If that is so, then its pronouncement

that the Church is unable to bless same-sex unions is utterly unsurprising and obviously correct.

Yet this leaves open the question of whether the Church could bless an arrangement where two Catholics of the same sex commit to each other in a chaste relationship. An example of this is the American poet Dunstan Thompson (1918-1975), a gay man who was raised Catholic and reverted to his childhood faith in 1952. His lover, Philip Trower (1923-2019), also converted to Catholicism that same year. Thompson and Trower asked their priest whether they could live together chastely, and he chose to grant them this permission. They spent the rest of their lives together in loving and celibate devotion to God and to one another.⁸

We could pointedly ask: Was Thompson's spiritual director wrong to sanction this arrangement? The *responsum* does not tell us. This may be a question of semantics: Some may not regard the Thompson-Trower situation as being a "union" and thus not implicitly referenced in the *dubium*. The assumption of the *responsum* may be that, in most people's minds, a "union" (in the context of an emotional partnership) necessarily implies sexual congress between the united partners.

⁸ *Here at Last is Love: Selected Poems of Dunstan Thompson*, edited by Gregory Wolfe, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015.

However, it is not obvious, either from Catholic theology or from common parlance, that a “union” in the context of emotional partnership needs to involve sexual activity or arousal. The Blessed Mother and St. Joseph’s marriage was chaste, yet JP II, citing St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, called it an “indivisible union of souls,” a “union of hearts,” and a “virginal and holy union.”⁹ Since then, the Church has seen many examples of “Josephite” marriages in which the partners remained continent, including Blessed Luigi Quattrochi and Blessed Maria Quattrochi, Jacques and Raissa Maritain, Eddie Doherty and Servant of God Catherine Doherty, and, possibly, St. King Henry II and St. Cunegund. No one would suggest that these were anything less than genuine unions.¹⁰ Moreover, even in the secular world, one can find the phrase “celibate union” in

⁹ *Redemptoris Custos*, August 15, 1989, paragraph 7.

¹⁰ Interestingly, the Catechism strongly indicates that the essence of a union lies, not in sexual activity, but in mutual commitment. CCC 2390 condemns “free unions” in which a couple has sexual intercourse without solemnizing their relationship sacramentally or legally. The paragraph argues: “*The expression ‘free union’ is fallacious: what can ‘union’ mean when the partners make no commitment to one another, each exhibiting a lack of trust in the other, in himself, or in the future?*” One could argue that the Catechism sees sex as a necessary but not sufficient element for a union, but it is worth noting that it elsewhere refers to “carnal unions,” a seeming redundancy if “union” necessarily involves carnal intercourse.

mainstream news sources,¹¹ and, as we will see, even secular legislation regulating “civil unions” does not require that they involve any commitment to sexual activity.

Given that the *responsum* has already pronounced on the impermissibility of “same-sex unions,” it is probably best, for the sake of clarity and continuity, that we do not confuse the issue by calling relationships like that of Thompson and Trower “same-sex unions.” We should, to avoid scandal and giving the appearance of approving of sin, to affirm that same-sex unions cannot be approved of by the Church.

But this leaves open the question of situations like Thompson-Trower arrangement. If we do not have a proper term for this kind of partnership, it will be difficult for the Magisterium to pronounce on it one way or another. Can we call it a “same-sex friendship”? This seems inadequate. Most people recognize that friendships can be somewhat situational; a friendship can wane with distance, a change of circumstances, *etc.* What Thompson and Trower gave each other was a promise of cohabitation, mutual support, and shared emotional affection, under the direction of a priest. This is something more duty-imposing and exclusive than a mere friendship.

¹¹ For example, “Can a sexless marriage be happy?,” Judith Woods, *The Daily Mail*, January 30, 2007.

This article will refer to committed but chaste relationships like this as “same-sex companionships,” which does not have the possible sexual connotation of “union” but also denotes a level of association and obligation which “friendship” does not. (This phrase is also inspired by the language of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, which we will come to later.) Having recognized that the Church cannot bless same-sex unions, can she bless same-sex companionships? The *responsum* does not speak to this, but church history suggests that the answer may be “yes.”

The Sibling-Making Ceremony

In his book *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*,¹² the gay Christian historian John Boswell drew attention to the historical fact of a Christian ritual blessing called the *adelphopoiesis*, or “sibling-making.”¹³ From

¹² Villard Books, 1994.

¹³ Boswell mainly relied on medieval Eastern liturgical texts for his information about this ceremony. Elizabeth A.R. White argues that *adelphopoiesis* was also widespread in the medieval West: “For the East, the most abundant documentation is liturgical, and traces of such relationships in other sources are rare...For the West the situation is precisely the reverse...The Western cases of individuals linked by ritual fraternal ties” are numerous, but “as regards the ceremonial by which the

the evidence we have, it seems for all the world to be an example of the Church, or at least her representatives, blessing chaste same-sex partnerships characterized by intense emotional and spiritual friendship.

Some versions of this blessing involve each companion placing one hand on the Gospel while holding a lit candle in the other. The priest is to pray that, just as God found it fitting for the apostles Philip and Bartholomew and the martyrs Sergius and Bacchus to “be united, bound one unto the other not by nature but by faith and the spirit,” He also bless His servants here present, “granting unto them peace and love and oneness of mind.” The ceremony concludes with the two spiritual siblings, who share a “spiritual love,” kissing the Gospel, the priest, and each other.

In her critical review of Boswell’s book, Robin Darling Young recounts how she and her traveling companion underwent a form of this ritual at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. As she describes it,

After the liturgy, the bishop had us join our right hands together and he wrapped them in a portion of his garment. He pronounced a series

ties were forged in the West, there is no strictly liturgical evidence." "Ritual Brotherhood in Medieval Western Europe," *Traditio*, Vol. 52 (1997), 358.

*of prayers over us, told us that we were united as sisters, and admonished us not to quarrel. Ours was a sisterhood stronger than blood, confirmed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he said, and since it was a spiritual union, it would last beyond the grave.*¹⁴

Boswell argued that this was ceremony was effectively a gay marriage liturgy. As his reviewers at the time noted, however, this claim can be thoroughly debunked simply by considering the very evidence he puts forward.¹⁵ For example, one *adelphopoiesis* prayer reads, “Cleanse from their hearts every stain and impurity and vouchsafe unto them to love one other without hatred and without scandal all the days of their lives.” It is, to say the very least, implausible to imagine that a sexual relationship between two men or two women could be regarded as “pure” or “without scandal.” The intention of this “sibling-making” blessing was clearly that the two involved would henceforth relate to each other as intimately, but also as chastely, as siblings would.

¹⁴ “Gay Marriage: Reimagining Church History,” Robin Darling Young, *First Things*, November 1994.

¹⁵ Camille Paglia noted this in her review of the book: “Despite sporadic qualifications, Boswell repeatedly implies a genital subtext to intense spiritual alliances, even when his supporting manuscripts make clearly uncarnal invocations to martyred paired saints, who died in the service of Christ” (*Washington Post*, July 17, 1994).

The fact that the *adelphopoiesis* ceremony was widely practiced for centuries in both East and West, effectively up to the present day, is not, in and of itself, proof that the Church has the power to bless same-sex companionships; it is possible every instance of this was a priest acting *ultra vires* and invalidly. But, if so, it is odd that the Magisterium does not appear to have ever restricted or anathematized it. In the wake of the *responsum*, it may be advisable for the Magisterium to pronounce definitively on whether the Church really does possess the power to bless these kinds of chaste same-sex companionships and, if so, whether it is advisable for clergy to do so.

This article will argue that the answer to both is “yes.”

Same-Sex Companionships and Grace

In explaining when the Church is empowered to bless, the *responsum* states that, “when a blessing is invoked on particular human relationships...it is necessary that what is blessed be objectively and positively ordered to receive and express grace, according to the designs of God inscribed in creation, and fully revealed by Christ the Lord.”

The secular world’s understanding of homosexuality, as with its understanding of nearly all moral issues relating to sexuality, is hopelessly muddled and confused. Homosexuality is seen as an integral part of a gay person’s identity; it is seen as a disposition to

find emotional fulfillment in romantic relationships with a person of the same sex; and it is seen as a physical desire for sexual intercourse with persons of the same sex. By mingling these together into one, the world can accuse the Church of forcing gay people to reject something integral to their own identity in prohibiting them from having same-sex intercourse.

Christian believers can also fall prey to confused thinking on this issue, given the sloppily defined concepts we are given to work with. Thus, some Christians are uncomfortable with the terminology of “gay Christians” because, they argue, this language makes a person’s proclivity to sin part of their inherent identity. In a “pastoral statement” from January of 2021, the Bishops of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) reject the phrase “gay Christian” because, among other reasons, “in the Bible and in the history of Christianity, we do not find the people of God defining themselves or forming relationships and communities according to sexual desire and attractions.”¹⁶ Notice that “gay” is here seen as synonymous with a certain kind of “sexual desire.”¹⁷ Michael Hannon similarly argues

¹⁶ "Sexuality and Identity: A Pastoral Statement from the College of Bishops," Anglican Church of North America, January 19, 2021.

¹⁷ This is perplexing because the statement elsewhere acknowledges that “some employ a very nuanced argument that while gay lust is sinful, gay attraction in itself need not be lustful but can represent an aesthetic

that self-description of homosexuality “intensifies lust, a sad distortion of love, by amplifying the apparent significance of concupiscent desires.”¹⁸

But these arguments make the mistake of thinking that sexual orientation is equivalent to having physical desires (“lust”) rather than about how one experiences fulfillment through emotional intimacy. This emotional disposition may often be beset with a certain kind of sexual desire, but this does not make it identical to this temptation.¹⁹

appreciation of beauty and a desire for chaste friendship.” This argument is recognized, but not addressed. The component of “aesthetic appreciation” in homosexuality should not be neglected in our analysis, but should be clearly distinguished from sexual desire, despite its possible proximity to it. “Straight” people are capable of aesthetically appreciating people of the opposite sex without lust, though this can take a certain level of moral maturity and human formation. A sufficiently formed person can even behold a provocatively dressed member without violating the custody of the eyes, as shown in the case of St. Nonnus beholding St. Pelagia the Penitent. Similarly, Francis of Assisi was tempted by the prospect of marrying and siring children, but this did not mean he could not have a spiritual friendship with Clare.

¹⁸ "Against Heterosexuality," Michael W. Hannon, *First Things*, March 2014.

¹⁹ That being said, even if that inclination *were* an inclination towards sexual sin, Catholic hamartiology would not say that this makes the inclination itself sinful. The Presbyterian Church of America’s report on its Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality condemns the

Like St. Thomas in the *Summa*, we should be careful to make distinctions in our use of words so that we do not fall into the fallacy of equivocation. Paragraph 2357 of the Catechism defines homosexuality as “relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex.” The qualifier *sexual* is important here because of its obvious carnal connotation. Sexual attraction between two members of the same sex cannot, as the Catechism puts it, express “a genuine affective and sexual complementarity.”

However, used colloquially, homosexuality is understood as something besides sexual attraction. As Christopher Hitchens put it, “Homosexuality is not just a form of sex. It's a form of love.”²⁰ Although Hitchens was famously atheistic, he was, in this case,

language of “gay Christians” because, among other reasons, “We reject the Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence whereby disordered desires that afflict us due to the Fall do not become sin without a consenting act of the will. These desires within us are not mere weakness or inclinations to sin but are themselves idolatrous and sinful.” For the Calvinist, even mere homosexual tendencies are sinful, but this was condemned at the Council of Trent (Session V, I.5). Catholics recognize that proclivities to sin exist without themselves being sinful.

²⁰ “My Queer Friend Christopher Hitchens,” Doug Ireland, *Gay City News*, January 4, 2012.

paraphrasing Oscar Wilde, a lifelong Christian and admirer of the Church who finally became Catholic on his deathbed,²¹ who described “the love that dare not speak its name” as being “that deep, *spiritual* affection that is as pure as it is perfect” (emphasis added).

Whatever credibility one wishes to grant or not to grant Hitchens or Wilde, what is important here is that many perceive a distinction between homosexuality as a form of sexual attraction and homosexuality as a form of social disposition. Most dictionary definitions of “homosexuality” connect to “sexual or romantic attraction” to members of the same (*homo-*) sex. “Romantically” is the key word here; to be romantically attracted to someone is generally understood as meaning that you are emotionally drawn to or seeking a level of emotional intimacy with them, over and above simply desiring to be sexually involved with them. If it is difficult to conceive of romantic affection without carnality, remember that the etymology of the word “romance” derives from chivalric tales depicting knights in what has been called “courtly love,” that is, an intensely spiritual affection that is almost always physically unconsummated.²² The very origins of the word

²¹ *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*, Joseph Pearce, Ignatius Press, 2000.

²² Indeed, Troubadour love poetry is often so intensely emotional and non-physical in nature that some have even suggested the influence of Cathar anti-materialism, while

“romance” practically denote a non-sexual relationship.

Romantic and sexual attraction may usually accompany each other, but one can fulfil their attraction towards a person without having sexual congress with them. Think again of the Josephite marriages: These involved heterosexuals who were romantically drawn to each other and found emotional satisfaction in a union of hearts and of souls, but without sexual union occurring. The continence involved did not make these relationships, or the people involved in them any less “heterosexual.” It is not clear why this could not also be true of homosexual relationships. Thus, it is not making sin essential to a person’s identity to call them “a gay Christian.” It is a statement about the sort of people with whom they find emotional and psychological connection; any accompanying carnal desires are accidental rather than substantial properties of this orientation.

Is a strong but chaste emotional connection between two persons of the same sex “objectively and positively ordered to receive grace”? The Church’s indubitable experience has been that intense friendship between persons of the same sex can, indeed, be a powerful means of grace. Importantly,

others link it to devotion to the Blessed Mother. *Reason and Sexuality in Western Thought*, David West, Wiley, 2005, 94.

after explaining why homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered, the Catechism states in paragraph 2359 that those with same-sex attraction can “resolutely approach Christian perfection” with the aid of prayer, sacramental grace, and “disinterested friendship.”

When asked to define “friend,” the normally scientific Aristotle reached for a poetic metaphor: “A single soul dwelling in two bodies.”²³ In his eulogy for his dear friend, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzus used this exact image to depict the unity that the two men shared:

We were contained by Athens, like two branches of some river-stream, for after leaving the common fountain of our fatherland, we had been separated in our varying pursuit of culture, and were now again united by the impulsion of God no less than by our own agreement...And when, as time went on, we acknowledged our mutual affection, and that philosophy was our aim, we were all in all to one another, housemates, messmates, intimates, with one object in life, or an affection for each other ever growing warmer and stronger...Such were our feelings for each other, when we had thus supported, as Pindar has it, ‘our well-built chamber with pillars of gold,’ as we advanced under the united influences of God's

²³ *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laërtius, Book VI, Chapter 1.

*grace and our own affection. Oh! How can I mention these things without tears...We struggled, not each to gain the first place for himself, but to yield it to the other; for we made each other's reputation to be our own. We seemed to have one soul, inhabiting two bodies.*²⁴

Throughout his (clearly very emotional) memorial, Gregory uses images indicating that God had united Basil and himself through their shared love of God and truth, a love which took the tangible form of them living, eating, and working together as an expression of their mutual affection. Theirs was a loving union that God has brought about as a sacramental. (The image of the two men sharing meals gives warrant to the use of the descriptive appellation “companions,” with its etymological suggestion of sharing bread, to describe these kinds of partnerships.)

This is the kind of “spiritual friendship” that Aelred of Rievaulx described in his book of that title from the 12th century, the friendship which holds nothing back from one’s companion and which calls on Christ to be the third member of their bond. We can observe many examples of this sort of perfectly chaste friendship throughout church history. It is sometimes witnessed between people of different sexes, as with St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi or

²⁴ “Oration 43: Funeral Oration on the Great St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia.”

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyer. Other times, it occurs between people of the same sex, as with Basil and Gregory, or the fourth century military martyrs St. Sergius and St. Bacchus.

Our modern mania for psychoanalysis will probably drive us to wonder of these companions from church history: “Were they gay?” John Boswell (in)famously argued that many of them were in *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*. Much of the evidence he adduced has been justly criticized as misleading or inaccurately presented,²⁵ but we should also note trying to determine whether a historical figure was “actually” gay itself is probably wrong-headed. Sexual orientation is a modern and Western concept; not every culture has thought it necessary to label and categorize human emotions so compulsively and obsessively.²⁶

²⁵ An example of Boswell’s questionable scholarship is in how he interprets the martyrdom of Sergius and Bacchus. In the martyrology, Bacchus is killed first and appears to Sergius in a vision that night urging him to hold fast and follow him even to death. Boswell translates Bacchus as telling Sergius that, if he dies for his faith, his reward will be to be with Bacchus again; Young (1994) notes that Sergius’ admonition can be more accurately translated as saying that the reward will be the crown of martyrdom that they will both share.

²⁶ We should note Michael Foucault’s famous, if controversial, thesis that sexuality itself is a social construct. This was a point of contention between him

Jin Xing, a wildly popular Chinese transgender celebrity, has pointed out how even a few decades ago in China, people did not think in this kind of “identarian” way. “Before China opened, before the ‘80s,” Xing explains, we don’t talk about homosexual[ity].” At the time, if people saw two boys or two soldiers walking down the street holding hands, they would simply assume that the pair were good friends and think nothing else of it. But since China allowed Western thinking to flow into and influence its culture, people have begun to assume that anyone engaging in that kind of behavior must be gay. “This kind of labelizing [*sic*] makes life much more sensitive and complicated,” Xing concludes, suggesting that this type of categorization is ultimately unhelpful.²⁷

and John Boswell, with the latter regarding Foucault as a neo-nominalist and himself as an essentialist.

²⁷ “Davos 2017 - Discover a World beyond X and Y Genes,” World Economic Forum, YouTube, January 17, 2017, 23:36-24:34. This may be an example of the difference between what Marshall McLuhan called “visual” and “acoustic”, or “left-brained” and “right-brained” ways of perceiving the world. McLuhan argued that the phonetic alphabet had caused the Western mind to become more sequential and linear, dedicated to “categorizing and classifying data. As knowledge is extended in alphabetic form, it is localized and fragmented.” This was in contrast to the Chinese mind, which, with its “hieroglyphic” written characters, was more intuitive and holistic. For McLuhan, a convert to

It may be that trying to determine whether these historical personages were homosexual is also fruitless. Obviously, we can firmly assert that these friendships were all sexually chaste. Beyond that, is there any value (or even any possibility) of distinguishing between deep affective friendships and “gay” emotional intimacy? Was St. Anselm of Canterbury just the sort of person who experienced such deep affective relationships with men such that he called them his “lovers” in his letters to them, or was he “gay”? Did St. John Henry Newman merely “love” Ambrose St. John, with whom he was buried, or was he “in love” with him? In either case, if that love were chaste and spiritual love, then exactly what difference would it make whether it was “romantic”?

If we recognize that these kinds of deep and loving same-sex friendships can be a means of grace, many issues are cleared up for us. We can easily understand why, as the *responsum* recognizes, same-sex unions often contain “positive elements”: Because they include that key ingredient of committed friendship, though it may be contaminated by unchastity. It seems as if they are the sort of human relationships that can be blessed by the Church so that they can bring their participants closer to Christ.

Catholicism, the difference between visual and acoustic culture had profound religious implications. “The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan,” Eric Norden, *Playboy Magazine*, March 1969.

It may seem uncontroversial that same-sex *friendships* can be blessed by the Church. But we should go further: Can, and should, situations where two members of the same sex make a commitment to live with each other in an exclusive and dedicated way be blessed by the Church? There is good reason to think so.

What the Human Person is Called To

The *responsum* acknowledges that there “*individual* persons with homosexual inclinations, who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God as proposed by Church teaching” (emphasis added). But the human person is not called to live as an “individual person,” a phrase which is nearly a contradiction in terms. “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). The very reason the Church uses personalist language is precisely because it draws attention to the fact that, like the Persons of the Holy Trinity, human beings are communal and other-oriented by nature.

The effectively unqualified rejection of same-sex unions and the reference to “individual” homosexual people could lead one to conclude that the single life is the only option open to gay Catholics. But, basing himself on the Church’s tradition, Hans Urs von Balthasar (founder of the secular institute known as the Community of St. John) denies that singleness is a normative state or vocation in *The Christian State of*

Life. “[I]t is clear from both the Old and the New Testaments,” he argues, “that the person who is unmarried, but not otherwise obligated, is to be regarded, not as the rule, but as the exception.”²⁸

Instead, both Scripture and the Church’s spiritual luminaries (he cites 1 Timothy 5:4-14 as well as Basil, Aquinas, and Suárez) indicate that there are two normative Christian states of life: Marriage and religious life, or consecrated virginity. “Until one chooses a state of life,” Balthasar explains, “one must continue in *a state of waiting*” (emphasis in original). This “waiting period” is valid while it lasts, but its virginity “is not to be confused with a definitive and absolute state.” If a definitive choice for marriage or religious life never occurs, “the life-form [of singleness] continues to be one of prolonged waiting.”²⁹ There can be “borderline cases” where, for example, a single person takes a vow of virginity “within the context of her life in the world” because “entrance into a community is impossible for serious reasons,” but we should never take these exceptions as being normative or a valid “third state.”³⁰

²⁸ *The Christian State of Life*, Hans Urs von Balthasar (translated by Sister Mary Frances McCarthy), Ignatius Press, 1983, e-book, 202.

²⁹ Balthasar, 1983, 202.

³⁰ Balthasar, 1983, 200. Despite this, being single “has become almost an ideal and is regarded even by Catholics as something almost normal in this age of disillusionment with marriage, secularization of religious houses, states like colonies of ants, and a liberalism that values the

What does this mean for gay Christians? Normatively speaking—that is to say, not counting exceptional cases of lifelong singleness—it seems to entail that they are either called to marriage, meaning a (typically) sexual relationship with a member of the opposite sex,³¹ or that they must enter religious life. This is a life that involves making commitments (in the form of professing vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience) which require living continently and devoting yourself to prayerful service to others. It also normally means living in a community that is analogous to a family: Institutes of consecrated life are led by an “abbot” (from *abba*, “father”), or a “mother superior,” or someone with a different title but a similar parental role, and it consists of “brothers” (e.g., “friars”) or “sisters.” God cured Adam’s loneliness by putting him into a family, and the consecrated life is also, usually, a form of family life.³²

freedom of self-determination as the highest goal.”
Balthasar, 1983, 203.

³¹ “Mixed-orientation marriages” of this nature can be found somewhat widely in communities like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which has no tradition of celibacy or consecrated life. “This openly gay Mormon wants the world to know he’s proudly and ‘happily’ married to a straight woman,” Lily Wakefield, *Pink News*, August 12, 2020.

³² It is worth remembering that the Church has traditionally and even dogmatically asserted that the religious life is higher than the married life, primarily

Is there a “monastic option” for homosexual partnerships? Could chaste same-sex companionships become a kind of consecrated mini-community?

The ACNA statement doubts this possibility, arguing that “the power of the monastic movements, originating in the time of the Roman Empire and continuing to the present, is the non-attractional basis for them...we do not find the people of God

because it is more eschatologically perfect. St. Jerome refuted the former monk Jovinian, who denied this superiority and was later excommunicated and had his views condemned by Pope St. Siricus at a Roman synod in 392. Virginitly and continence are a sort of ideal here. Indeed, while popular presentations of Theology of the Body that try to suggest the Church is “sex-positive” (and, in some sense, she is), there is a strong patristic tradition (particularly in St. Augustine of Hippo) of “sex-negativity” which sees sexual intercourse as being a consequence of the Fall, or at least deeply tainted by it. We may be well advised to recover some of this “negativity.” A too-“positive” view of sex can be misleading and unhelpful, giving the impression that the Church’s sexual ethic is a guarantee for thrilling and pleasurable sex, which not only sets some married couples up for disappointment but also makes the Church seem more unjust and unfair to people who seem effectively condemned to continence for life. Gratifying heterosexual sex is not normative, but some sort of intentional community is. *The History of Catholic Sexual Morality* (Unpublished master's thesis). Christine Viney, University of Calgary, December 1998.

defining themselves or forming relationships and communities according to sexual desire and attractions.” Note once again the mistaken idea that same-sex proclivities necessarily involve “sexual desire.” What about emotional attachment?

“Instead,” the statement continues, these “relationships and communities are defined in terms of commonly shared beliefs, prayer, commitments, and service.” But this is a false dichotomy. What about relationships and communities formed on mutual affection *and* devotion to God? This is what Basil and Gregory, who lived and ate together, loved one another, and passionately pursued God side-by-side, shared with each other. This argument also ignores the fact that, throughout the Church’s history, new forms of consecrated life have sprung up and receive official approval, such as the mendicant orders of the 13th century and the secular institutes of the 20th century.

But, perhaps most egregiously, it ignores the precedent of the *adelphopoeisis*, the “sibling-making” ceremony. Not only do we often speak of a Josephite union, or similarly continent arrangements that normally involve sexual intercourse, as requiring the spouses to “live as brother and sister;” we also know that consecrated religious communities typically use this same kind of familial language, referring to their members as “brothers” and “sisters.” In fact, rather than viewing this ceremony as an analogy to marriage (as Boswell did), we would probably be better served

to see it as a kind of monastic initiation, or “final vows.” Thompson and Trower also show how a priest willing to be the pair’s spiritual father can serve as a kind of “abbot” to the micro-monastery of this kind of household.

This would not be the first time the Church has “monasticized” a form of living in the world; St. Bernard of Clairvaux did much the same thing when he created a rule or *regula* for the Knights Templar during the Crusades. It is hard to imagine that liturgists and theologians could not similarly develop the *adelphopoiesis* into a kind of monastic consecration with its own rule of life.

Some theological reflection would be necessary to determine exactly how the evangelical counsels would be lived out in that context. That being said, we should remember Balthasar’s remark: “The more closely human love resembles God’s love, the more it forgets and surrenders itself in order to assume the inner form of poverty, chastity, and obedience.”³³

The work of Lasnoski suggesting that the counsels are essentially contained within Matrimony (for example, the poverty of shared finances) may be instructive for coming up with a *regula* for the *adelphopoiesis*.³⁴ In commenting on Lasnoski,

³³ Balthasar, 1983, 209.

³⁴ *Renewing a Catholic Theology of Marriage through a Common Way of Life: Consonance with Vowed Religious Life-*

Mikolášiková suggests that obedience in marriage is best fulfilled by the guidance of “a spiritual director who partly takes on the role of a superior.”³⁵ Something similar could be normativized for monasticized same-sex unions. Indeed, Thompson and Trower’s experience shows how a priest willing to be the pair’s spiritual father can serve as a kind of “abbot” to the micro-monastery of this kind of household.

Spiritual friendships are one thing, but, as Balthasar suggests, the human person is normally called to make a kind of definitive commitment to Christ through a particular vocation in the world. An ecclesial ceremony recognizing but also imposing clear rules upon committed friendships could make this a reality for gay Catholics.

The Church of England’s Position

We should note that, in their public proclamations relating to same-sex attraction, the Church of England has articulated some of these points with commendable clarity. In December of 2019, the House of Bishops of the Church of England released

in-Community Way of Life: Consonance with Vowed Religious Life-in-Community (doctoral thesis), Kent Lasnoski, Marquette University, May 2011.

³⁵ *The Evangelical Counsels in Marriage as the Way of Participation in the Perfection of the Consecrated State of Life* (Licentiate of Sacred Theology thesis), Andrea Mikolášiková, Katholische Hochschule ITI, 2013, 87-89.

a "pastoral statement" in response to the fact that, earlier that year, the U.K. had opened "civil partnerships" (which were originally only available to same-sex couples) to opposite-sex couples, same-sex marriage having been legalized in the U.K. in 2013.

The statement clearly explained exactly what these civil partnerships actually were: "As with marriage, civil partnerships embody the concept of committed fidelity between two persons, mutually consenting to their relationship." (In other words, they are a kind of "union.") However, as the House shrewdly points out, the legislation "leave[s] entirely open the nature of the commitment that members of a couple choose to make to each other when forming a civil partnership. In particular, it is not predicated on the intention to engage in a sexual relationship." There will therefore likely be civil partnerships "where there is no intention for the relationship to be expressed through sexual activity."

In light of that "ambiguity" in the legislation, "people in a variety of relationships will be eligible to register as civil partners, some living consistently with the teaching of the Church, others not." Due to the uncertainty over how faithful these unions will be to Anglican teaching, "the House of Bishops affirms that clergy of the Church of England should not provide services of blessing for those who register a civil partnership." That being said, "clergy need to have regard to the teaching of the church on sexual morality, celibacy, and the positive value of

committed friendships in the Christian tradition” (emphasis in original). The House “affirm[s] the value of committed, sexually abstinent friendships” and seems to recognize that these friendships can be legally legitimized by becoming civil partnerships. To put it succinctly: It appears that Anglicans can legitimately be in a same-sex civil partnership as long as they maintain continence.

This statement at least recognizes the possibility, and, indeed, the reality of celibate same-sex companionships, and gives an indication of why legal protection and support for them in the form of civil partnerships or civil unions is desirable. That being said, the House’s clarification is not completely satisfying. If there is concern that same-sex unions cannot be blessed because some are chaste and some are not, could a liturgical blessing not be composed which makes explicit that the couple being blessed are committed to following church teaching on sexuality?

The *responsum* similarly expresses concern that a blessing for same-sex unions “would constitute a certain imitation or analogue of the nuptial blessing” when, as Pope Francis has stated, same-sex relationships are not “even remotely analogous” to Holy Matrimony. This is where a renewed and Magisterially-approved *adelphopoiesis* ritual with unambiguous language seems so necessary: Such a celebration could make clear that the Church is not *marrying* these friends, but *monasticizing* them.

Conclusion

The *responsum* was unambiguously clear that the Church cannot deviate from what Christ has revealed about human nature, the sacrament of marriage, and the appropriate role of sexual activity. In a morally confused age, this clarity is welcome. However, clarity is also required on the question of whether chaste same-sex affection can be ordered towards receiving grace and thus blessed by the Church.

The answer to this *dubium* was an opportunity to provide this clarity, but, while the *responsum* correctly upholding the Biblical and traditional teaching on sexual morality, it lacked a clear Christian alternative to Christians with homosexual inclinations apart from a general encouragement to live by Church teaching. A more anthropologically sound option should be offered and indeed has been offered by the Church historically: A committed and nurturing chaste union between persons of the same sex.

As Catholics, we should work towards a recognition of these companionships, both in the civil order (through legal protection of non-marital unions) and in the Church (in the form of a restored *adelphopoiesis* rite). Not only would this be pastoral

and nourishing to gay Catholics, but it would also be a powerful witness to an oversexed world of the healing power of graced community and chastity.



Embracing the Challenges of Friendship: A Critique of “Making Room for Siblings in the Spirit”

Fr Philip G. Bochanski

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Like many faithful Catholics, Brett Fawcett, has read carefully the *Responsum ad dubium* that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published in 2021, explaining why the Church cannot provide rituals of blessing to solemnize same-sex unions between people who share a sexual relationship like that of married spouses. He rightly notes that the *responsum* involves much more than just a liturgical rite, giving consideration to the nature of relationships between people of the same sex, the Church’s concern for them, and the reason that the Church supports the spiritual lives of individuals and groups through sacraments, blessings and other sacramentals.

In his essay, *Making Room for Siblings in the Spirit*, Mr Fawcett draws attention to the careful way that the CDF phrases its explanation (as usual), and finds instructive both what it says and what it leaves out. From this starting point, he suggests that the fact that the CDF does not mention emotional relationships between people who experience same-sex attractions, and are together for that reason, but who are committed to avoiding sexual intimacy with each other, may mean that blessings for *these* couples are permissible. His essay then discusses the forms that such a blessing could take, and advocates for their adoption.

Although it is certainly well-intentioned, Mr Fawcett's proposal is ill-advised. Faithful people who experience same-sex attractions can and should find strength and consolation in strong, disinterested friendships, with God, with others who share their experience, and with those who do not. But the idea that consecrating an exclusive relationship between them is contradicted by the Church's understanding of the human person, of human sexuality, and of the nature of human relationships.

The Unique Context for Sexual Relationships

As a consequence of the Original Sin, the sexual faculty has become particularly susceptible to the effects of concupiscence. The mutual attraction of the

first man and woman, “the Creator’s own gift, changed into a relationship of domination and lust,”¹ However,

in his mercy God has not forsaken sinful man. The punishments consequent upon sin ... also embody remedies that limit the damaging effects of sin. After the fall, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one’s own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving.”²

These “remedies” are found in the characteristics of conjugal union itself, the framework that provides the unique context in which sexuality is properly *ordered*; namely, permanence, fidelity, complementarity, and procreativity. These “essential properties” of the relationship of marriage³ provide salutary challenges that serve as antidotes to concupiscence and to a selfish attitude toward sexual intimacy as a means of self-gratification.

The “mutual personal gift, proper and exclusive to themselves,” which a man and woman can share

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1607.

² CCC, no. 1609.

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* (2003), no. 2.

because of the complementary differences between them, allows them to “tend toward the communion of their persons.”⁴ This communion is their destiny, for “[God] created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be “helpmate” to the other, for they are equal as persons ... and complementary as masculine and feminine.”⁵ The “physical, moral and spiritual *difference* and *complementarity*” between them “are oriented towards the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life.”⁶

Thus, complementarity is constitutive of the marriage covenant, a necessary foundation on which to base the total gift of self that marriage requires. It also presents the first of several salutary challenges that helps each spouse to “open oneself to the other.”⁷ The physical differences between the spouses make sexual intercourse—often called “the marriage act” itself—possible, while at the same time requiring each spouse to be attentive to the reactions of the other to arousal, interaction, and completion of the act, as each one’s body responds at a different pace.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ CCC, no. 372.

⁶ CCC, no. 2333. Emphasis in original.

⁷ CCC, no. 1609.

At the same time, the “moral and spiritual” differences in their emotions, communication styles and personalities (to name but a few aspects) deeply affect not only the context of lovemaking, but indeed the whole of their relationship. The same differences which make falling in love thrilling can make a decades-long marriage trying at times, but it is precisely this emotional complementarity that draws each one to be patient, understanding and merciful toward the other.

The Church insists on the necessity of this physical and personal complementarity for ordering sexual intimacy. Thus, among the reasons the *Catechism* provides in support of its statement that “under no circumstances can” same-sex sexual actions “be approved” is that they “are contrary to the natural law”⁸—that is, that by the nature of their anatomy and physiology, bodies of the same sex cannot be united such that “they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24; see also Mt 19:4-6; Mk 10:8; Eph 5:31). A second reason is that “they do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity.”⁹ Same-sex intimate actions may be intended to convey affection and love and can certainly be gratifying to each and to both. But

⁸ CCC, no. 2357.

⁹ *Ibid.*

without “physical, moral and spiritual complementarity” and the salutary challenges it provides, their sexual interactions, and the relationship built around these actions, will ultimately be detrimental to the couple’s spiritual and personal lives, rather than fulfilling them.

The third reason that the Church rules out same-sex sexual relations is that “they close the sexual act to the gift of life.”¹⁰ People of the same sex simply cannot procreate—they will never conceive a child as the outcome of their act of sexual intimacy. Yet “a child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfillment.”¹¹

In the divine plan for spouses, “their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man,” and “this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful.” “The *union of man and woman* in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator’s generosity and fecundity”¹² and therefore “it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ CCC, no. 2366.

¹² CCC, no. 2235, emphasis in original.

ordered *per se* to the procreation of human life.”¹³ Procreativity “cannot be separated” from the intimate union of the spouses “without altering the couple’s spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family.”¹⁴

Thus, openness to procreativity is as fundamental to the relationship of the spouses as is complementarity. Both are necessary for the protection of “the goods of marriage” and the “flourishing of family life,” and in fact the very “future of the family.”¹⁵ As the physical and moral complementarity of the spouses provides an inherent antidote to “one-person” selfishness—their differences mean that in their sexual relations, as in their relationship as a whole, they must not be self-centered but attentive to, patient with and receptive to the other — so the natural tendency of the marriage act to be fruitful provides a salutary challenge that works to overcome “two-person” selfishness around sexual intimacy. If, as the fruit of an act of intimacy between them, the couple may be responsible for loving, rearing, and caring for a third person (namely, the child who is the fruit of their union), then the question to ask in contemplating sexual relations is not simply,

¹³ Pope St Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae vitae* on the Regulation of Birth (July 25, 1968), no. 11.

¹⁴ CCC, no. 2363.

¹⁵ CCC., nn. 2333, 2363.

“Is this permitted, and do we consent to it?” Rather, openness to procreativity calls couples to ask themselves and each other, “Are we a family, and are we ready for our family to grow?” Here is a summary of chastity in marriage: the willingness of the couple to see sexual intimacy not just as *a thing they do* out of love for each other, but truly as *a sign of who they are* as a couple and a family.

What Kind of Union?

Lest this discussion of marriage between a man and a woman seem tangential to Mr Fawcett’s proposal for partnerships between people of the same sex, it is important to identify the context and purpose of the unions he is proposing. He is clear throughout his essay that he is not discussing “same-sex *sexual unions*”¹⁶ or arguing that such relationships can or should be solemnized as a form of, or an analogy to, marriage. However, his essay includes the same fatal flaw that he identifies in the *Responsum*; namely, that it “does not define what the ‘unions’ being referred to actually are,” so that “we can only make inferences about what ‘unions’ are, in this context, based on ... the reasoning that the document uses.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Author’s manuscript, p. 11 above. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Idem, p. 14 above.

Mr Fawcett explains that he is considering specifically “chaste same-sex companionships—that is, committed emotional partnerships between persons of the same sex which, ‘in fidelity to the revealed plans of God,’ do not include sexual intercourse or any other form of deliberate sexual arousal.”¹⁸ But this distinction between “sexual unions” and “emotional unions,” while central to his argument, is problematic considering Christian anthropology, the Church’s understanding of the nature of the human person and of human relationships. “The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole—*corpore et anima unus*—as a person. ... [R]eason and free will are linked with all the bodily and spiritual faculties.”¹⁹ The sexual faculty in particular “affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity”—that is, the emotions—“the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the

¹⁸ Idem, p. 9 above, quoting CDF, *Responsum to a dubium regarding the blessing of the unions of persons of the same sex* (2021). Emphasis in original.

¹⁹ Pope St John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis splendor* Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church’s Moral Teaching (August 6, 1993), no. 48.

aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.”²⁰

Therefore, the life of the emotions and desires is intimately connected with the life of the body and bodily actions, and vice versa; emotions, urges and desires (collectively, “the passions”) “form the passageway and ensure the connection between the life of the senses and the life of the mind.”²¹ To distinguish between “sexual unions” and “emotional unions” and make this distinction the difference between “chaste” and “unchaste” unions is dividing what the Church sees as indivisible—the life of the body and the life of the soul, including the emotions.

The problem here is perhaps best illustrated by the way that Mr Fawcett considers the deep bonds between various historical personages. “Obviously,” he states, “we can firmly assert that these friendships were all sexually chaste.”²² (It should be noted that here and elsewhere he uses the word *chaste* to denote relationships that are more precisely called *continent*. More on this later.) Then he asks two rhetorical questions; namely, “Beyond that, is there any value (or

²⁰ CCC, no. 2332.

²¹ CCC, 1764.

²² Author’s manuscript, p. 32 above.

even any possibility) of distinguishing between deep affective friendships and “gay” emotional intimacy? ... In any case, if that love were chaste and spiritual love, then exactly what difference would it make whether it was ‘romantic?’”²³

Mr Fawcett seems to think that the answers to these questions are respectively “no” and “none.” But this is almost immediately contradicted by another question he raises and resolves just a few paragraphs later. “It may seem uncontroversial that same-sex *friendships* can be blessed by the Church,” he asserts. “But we should go further: Can, and should, situations where two members of the same sex make a commitment to live with each other in an exclusive and dedicated way be blessed by the Church? There is good reason to think so.”²⁴

Here is an important key to evaluating Mr Fawcett’s proposal. While he continually refers to “same-sex companionships” as “emotional partnerships” that are “chaste” (again, read: *continent*) and therefore, in his terminology, “non-sexual,” it is clear that in his mind they are *more than friendship*. He made the point explicit earlier in the essay: “Can we call” such a

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Idem, p. 33 above.

partnership “a ‘same-sex friendship?’” he asks. “This seems inadequate.” Rather, he is thinking of “something more duty-imposing and exclusive than a mere friendship.” “Same-sex companionships,” he asserts, involve “a level of association and obligation which ‘friendship’ does not.”²⁵

The “level of association and obligation” that make these relationships more than “mere friendship,” then, is found in the “exclusive and dedicated” nature of the relationship. But to evaluate Mr Fawcett’s proposal, it is necessary first to consider whether such exclusivity and dedication are proper to non-sexual “companionship,” or more appropriately belong to erotic, and therefore marital, unions. Is it possible for the Church to solemnize something “more than friendship” yet “not quite marriage”? Does such a middle way exist, or must one choose one or the other?

Permanent and Exclusive “Non-Sexual” Relationships?

It has already been noted that the marriage relationship—the unique context for sexual intimacy—fundamentally requires complementarity and procreativity. “These two meanings or values of

²⁵ *Idem*, p. 18 above.

marriage cannot be separated,”²⁶ for “sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.”²⁷ But the other “essential properties” of marriage—namely, permanence and fidelity—are likewise fundamental. They are inseparable from each other, and equally inseparable from the properties of complementarity and procreativity.

“By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses.”²⁸ “The covenant they freely contracted imposes on the spouses the obligation to preserve it as unique and indissoluble,” for “love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement ‘until further notice’.”²⁹ Erotic love seeks to give a total gift of self to the beloved, and to receive a total gift in return. Between human beings, *eros* thus finds its fulfillment in sexual as well as emotional union, since “spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.”³⁰

“It is part of the growth of love (*amor*, in context referring to *eros*) towards higher levels and inward

²⁶ CCC, no. 2363.

²⁷ CCC, no. 2351.

²⁸ CCC, no. 1646.

²⁹ CCC, nn. 2364, 1646.

³⁰ CCC, no. 364.

purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being ‘for ever’.”³¹ The total gift of self that is facilitated by complementarity and becomes fruitful in procreativity requires a faithful commitment that is exclusive and permanent.

But “love seeks to be definitive” not only on the level of the commitment, but equally on the level of the gift. “In drawing near to the other, [eros] is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to “be there for” the other.”³² But “eros is impoverished and even loses its own nature” if this gift of self is not mutual; one “cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift.”³³

In a footnote to his essay, Mr Fawcett states that, “interestingly, the Catechism strongly indicates that the essence of a union lies, not in sexual activity, but in mutual commitment.”³⁴ While he may be correct to

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est* on Christian Love (December 25, 2005), no. 6.

³² *Idem*, no. 7.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Author’s manuscript, p. 6 above, note 10.

prioritize the marriage vow before the marriage act, by oversimplifying here, he creates a false dichotomy that contradicts the Church’s understanding of what makes a marriage. “One could argue,” he asserts, “that the Catechism sees sex as a necessary but not sufficient element for a union, but it is worth noting that [the Catechism] elsewhere refers to ‘carnal unions,’ a seeming redundancy if ‘union’ necessarily involves carnal intercourse.”³⁵ However, this is contradicted by the Code of Canon Law, which *requires* that both spouses not be impotent—that is, unable to accomplish marital intercourse—for the *validity* of the marriage bond, and draws a significant distinction about the *indissolubility* of the bond between marriages that are consummated by marital intercourse and those that are not.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Canon 1084, §1, states clearly that “antecedent and perpetual impotence to have sexual intercourse, whether on the part of the man or on that of the woman, whether absolute or relative, by its very nature invalidates marriage.” Canon 1061, §1, distinguishes “a valid marriage between baptized persons” that is “merely ratified” when consent is given but “is not consummated,” from one that is “ratified and consummated” by non-contracepted sexual intercourse. A “valid ... merely ratified” marriage may be dissolved in certain cases by the Roman Pontiff (see Canon 1142), while “a marriage which is ratified and consummated cannot be dissolved by any human power or by any cause other than death” (Canon 1141).

Therefore, just as permanence and exclusivity provide the context in which a total, complementary and procreative gift can be given, so complementarity and procreativity allow the permanent, exclusive gift of self to find its fulfilment in mutual, total self-giving. A relationship at such a high “level of association and obligation,” one that seeks to be “exclusive and dedicated” in a way that surpasses “mere friendship,” must be directed beyond itself. The physical and emotional total gift made possible by complementarity allows the gift to go beyond the individual, and the overflowing of mutual love as a life-giving, procreative reality draws the gift to go even beyond the couple.

To establish an exclusive and dedicated, permanent and faithful relationship with one person would eventually become stale, oppressive, and even self-destructive, were it not for the possibility to transcend, by a complementary and procreative gift of self, the limits of a mere partnership, and to grow into a family. Even then, the family must continue to grow and to include more than just the dedicated couple themselves, and the children born from their exclusive relationship. Human beings need more. This is a theme that is often addressed by the American author and humorist Kurt Vonnegut, particularly in university commencement addresses:

Only two major subjects remain to be covered: loneliness and boredom. ... We are so lonely because we don't have enough friends and relatives. Human beings are supposed to live in stable, like-minded, extended families of fifty people or more.

Marriage is collapsing because our families are too small. A man cannot be a whole society to a woman, and a woman cannot be a whole society to a man. We try, but it is scarcely surprising that so many of us go to pieces.³⁷

Some of you may become psychologists or ministers. In either case, you are going to have to deal with men, women, and children whose lives are being damaged by our country's astronomical divorce rate. You should know that when a husband and wife fight, it may seem to be about money or sex or power. But what they're really yelling at each other about is

³⁷ Kurt Vonnegut, Commencement address at Fredonia College, Fredonia, N.Y., May 20, 1978. In *If This Isn't Nice, What Is? The Graduation Speeches and Other Words to Live By*, selected and introduced by Dan Wakefield, second expanded edition (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2016), 13.

loneliness. What they're really saying is, "You're not enough people."

Back when most human beings lived in extended families and lived in the same part of the world for the whole of their lives, a marriage was really something to celebrate. ... The groom was going to get a lot of new pals, and the bride was going to get a whole new bunch of people to talk to about everything. Nowadays, most of us when we marry get just one person. ...

So again: If any of you educated people find yourselves in a therapeutic situation vis-à-vis a marriage on the rocks, please realize that the real problem may not be money or sex or power or how to raise a kid. The real trouble with the wife, as far as the husband is concerned, may be that she isn't enough people. The real trouble with the husband, as far as the wife is concerned, may be that he isn't enough people.³⁸

A husband, a wife, and some kids is not a family; it's a terribly vulnerable survival unit. Now those

³⁸ Kurt Vonnegut, Commencement address at Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Ga., May 15, 1999. In *If This Isn't Nice, What Is?* 23.

of you who get married or are married, when you fight with your spouse, what each of you will be saying to the other one actually is, “You’re not enough people. You’re only one person. I should have hundreds of people around.”³⁹

Vonnegut’s insights are hardly dispositive, much less dogmatic, for resolving the theological question of what makes a family. Yet they are very apt for identifying a central problem facing the exclusive, dedicated, more-than-a-friendship union that Mr Fawcett is proposing. If a marriage—one that is complementary, procreative, sealed by sexual intimacy, and augmented by children—still might not provide everything that a human being needs, how can one expect to find it from a union that, by its nature, excludes complementarity and procreativity, the possibility of a total gift of body and soul, and the flowering of the union in new life?

Continnence and Chastity

Mr Fawcett should be taken at his word that the kind of union he proposes would be continent: that is, that

³⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, Commencement address at Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y., May 8, 1994. In *If This Isn’t Nice, What Is?* 86.

the people seeking the Church's blessing on their partnership intend, agree, and commit to living together without deliberately engaging in physical sexual intimacy. But his insistence that these relationships will be more than "mere friendship" leads inevitably to the conclusion that the formation of such partnerships—starting with the choice of the partner—will be based on the shared experience of same-sex attraction. The members of the partnerships he is considering choose each other, at least in part, because both identify as LGBTQ; that is, they each experience an erotic attraction for at least certain people of the same sex. Is this an appropriate starting point for such a partnership?

Whether or not the two people involved are attracted to *each other* at the time that they form their partnership, and whether they expect this to change, or can foresee any circumstances in which it might, the reality is that such mutual attraction remains a possibility. Undertaking cohabitation in such a circumstance is at least potentially problematic; solemnizing such cohabitation so as to impose on oneself and the other duties and obligations to maintain the relationship as permanent and exclusive makes the potential danger much worse. There will never be a context in which acting on erotic attractions with the person to whom one is now permanently,

publicly, quasi-sacramentally bound will be moral for either or both of them.

Here one sees that the comparison of continent same-sex permanent unions with so-called “Josephite marriages” falls short. While the examples that Mr Fawcett cites were clearly “genuine unions,” that is, valid, ratified-but-not-consummated marriages, the fact remains that the couples would have been attracted to one another, and could have undertaken the consummation of the marriage. If this were not a possibility, at least physically, the marriage would not have been canonically valid at all (as was established above). Moreover, it is not unheard-of that a couple who committed to continence at the time of the wedding later, with the support and advice of the Church, found it better to establish regular marital relations. Such was the case, most famously, with Saint Louis and Saint Marie-Azélie Martin, the parents of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and eight other children. For the couples that Mr Fawcett has in mind, this initial commitment to continence in the face of (possibly mutual) attraction to persons of the same sex, while freely intended, is simply their consent to the demands of the moral life, rather than a voluntary sacrifice that could legitimately have been different.

All married people are called to be *chaste*, but few of them are called to be *continent*. The distinction is important. As has already been noted, continence refers to abstention from physical sexual acts, “reserv[ing] for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love.”⁴⁰ Continence may be required (as for unmarried people), voluntary (as for consecrated and/or ordained celibates), or periodic (as for a married couple who abstain from intercourse during fertile periods to delay conceiving a child).

Chastity, however, considers more than sexual acts, and refers to the entirety of a person’s sexuality:

Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man’s belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman.

⁴⁰ CCC, no. 2350.

The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift.⁴¹

Successfully integrated sexuality includes acknowledging and accepting one's sexual identity, and the necessary complementarity that this entails.⁴² It requires that one "orders the movements of the senses ... to the good and to beatitude,"⁴³ and to consider sexual attractions and other emotions in light of God's design for the human person and God's plan for and call to the individual. Because "strong feelings are not decisive for the morality or holiness of persons,"⁴⁴ "chastity includes an *apprenticeship in self-mastery* which is a training in human freedom,"⁴⁵ and allows one to choose to act or not to act on a particular impulse or attraction according to whether it facilitates or impedes one's living out of his identity and vocation.

"People should cultivate chastity in the way that is suited to their state of life. ... Married people are called

⁴¹ CCC, no. 2337.

⁴² CCC, no. 2333.

⁴³ CCC, no. 1768.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ CCC, no. 2339.

to live conjugal chastity.”⁴⁶ That is, they should order their passions and actions according to the essential properties of marriage, only entertaining desires, words, and actions that signify and strengthen their permanent, exclusive, complementary bond, and that are open, by their nature and intention, to procreation.

As previously noted, the essential properties of marriage are mutually reinforcing permanence and exclusivity make the complementary, procreative gift possible, and the overflowing of love through complementarity and procreativity provide life and direction for the permanent, exclusive bond. Properly ordered and integrated sexuality includes all of these properties, and married people pursue all of them together. But in Mr Fawcett’s proposal, same-sex partners—even with worthy intentions, pastoral guidance, deep love, and a firm commitment to continence—would be pursuing a permanent, exclusive, and erotically emotional bond in a relationship that by its nature excludes complementarity and procreativity. Such a partnership would thus be disordered and unintegrated, and therefore, while continent, would be unchaste.

⁴⁶ CCC, no. 2349. Internal quotation omitted.

Perhaps the most-quoted phrase in the *Responsum*, both in secular and ecclesiastical media has been, “[God] does not and can not bless sin.” Numerous commentators have seized on this phrase to take offense at the whole document. While this is certainly an overreaction, they are not wrong to suggest that a consideration of the situation of same-sex couples requires more nuance and application of the Church’s moral reasoning about deliberation, freedom, and culpability when it comes to imputing mortal sin to individuals. Yet it remains true that deliberate unchastity is sinful, and usually gravely so, not only in action but in thought and will (see, e.g., Mt 5:28). It is fair to suggest that a continent, same-sex emotional partnership would not involve sinful actions in the way that a same-sex sexual relationship would. But by pursuing some of the goods of marriage while excluding others, it would be unchaste, and it is correct to say, at least, that neither God nor the Church can bless unchastity.

Pastoral Acknowledgement and Accompaniment

This has not been an easy essay to write, because Mr Fawcett so obviously has good intentions and a deep desire to help people who experience same-sex attractions and desire to live chastely with the support

and blessing of the Church. Likewise, one hesitates to call into question the good will and commitment of the people Mr Fawcett has in mind. Yet, as the Church makes clear, “departure from the Church’s teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral. The neglect of the Church’s position prevents homosexual men and women from receiving the care they need and deserve.”⁴⁷ The difficult but necessary truth that needs to be communicated clearly is that chastity, for people who experience same-sex attractions as for anyone else, involves the whole person, not just that person’s actions. The Church cannot encourage, much less solemnize, permanent and exclusive relationships based on same-sex erotic *affection*, even when these relationships intend to exclude same-sex sexual *actions*.

Yet there must be some pastoral support and accompaniment that the Church can provide for a person who experiences same-sex attractions and who is asking himself and the Church where he can find his vocation, and how he will be able to make that “sincere

⁴⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church *Homosexualitas problema* on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (October 1, 1986), no. 15.

gift of himself” without which a person “cannot fully find himself.”⁴⁸

This is not the place for a full evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s apparent claim that since an unmarried person living in the world is always “in a state of waiting,” he is not living a true vocation.⁴⁹ But perhaps it is useful to counter this viewpoint with words of Pope Pius XII to young Catholic women gathered at the Vatican in October 1945. Speaking to them just five months after the end of World War II in Europe, in which many of their boyfriends, fiancés and husbands lost their lives, he asks them to consider where a real vocation is to be found:

When one thinks about the girls and young women who voluntarily renounce marriage, to consecrate themselves to a higher life of contemplation, of sacrifice and of charity, at once a luminous word comes to one’s lips: Vocation! It is the only word that suffices for such an elevated experience. This vocation, this call of love, makes itself known in very diverse ways, as the modulations of the divine voice are

⁴⁸ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* on the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965), no. 24.

⁴⁹ See the Author’s manuscript, p. 34-40 above.

infinitely varied: irresistible invitations, affectionately demanding inspirations, pleasing impulses.

But even the young Christian woman who remains unmarried despite wishing to be, who nevertheless firmly believes in the Providence of the heavenly Father, can recognize in the ups and downs of life the voice of the Master. *Magister adest et vocat te!* The Master is here, and he is calling you! (John 11:28)

She responds. She renounces the precious dream of her adolescence and of her youth—to have a faithful companion in life, to build a family. And in the impossibility of marriage, she discerns her vocation. Now, with a broken but docile heart, she gives her whole self to very noble and manifold good works.⁵⁰

Pius is not calling these women to consecrated virginity or instituting some new form of consecrated life in the Church. Rather, he is encouraging each woman who has lost the (present or future) spouse she expected to

⁵⁰ Pope Pius XII, “Address to a Gathering of Women from Italian Christian Societies”, October 21, 1945. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 37, 287.

have to “give her whole self to very noble and manifold good works” in her current situation. Whether her situation calls her to a more dedicated care of family members, or to more ample service in her parish, or to evangelize her workplace, or to care for the poor in her hometown, Pius is asking her to see in that situation a real vocation, a real call from the Master, to which she may freely and fully respond, even though she did not choose, and would not have chosen, for her life to turn out the way that it has.

Embracing the Challenges of Friendship

Mr Fawcett is, of course, correct that, in the divine plan, “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). However, perhaps relying too much on von Balthasar, he seems to see the possibility of “not-alone-ness” only in the creation of a family through marriage, or the joining of a religious “family” through consecration.⁵¹ Since marriage and procreation seems not to be an option for people who experience same-sex attractions in a predominant and more or less permanent way, Mr Fawcett looks to “the historical fact of a Christian ritual blessing called the

⁵¹ He does not address the reality of secular priests, who do not belong to communities of consecrated life, and increasingly live alone.

adelphopoiesis, or ‘sibling-making’⁵² as a way to provide “a ‘monastic option’ for homosexual partnerships,” thus creating “a kind of consecrated mini-community.”⁵³

Leaving aside the many complicated liturgical and historical questions regarding the nature and status of the purported “rite” of “making siblings”,⁵⁴ the question remains “whether it is advisable for clergy to do so” for people who experience same-sex attractions.⁵⁵ Mr Fawcett’s argument, that this is possible and advisable, is contradicted by the Church’s teaching about the lay faithful in general, and its advice

⁵² Author’s manuscript, p. 13 above.

⁵³ *Idem.*, page 19 p. 37 above.

⁵⁴ Mr Fawcett himself admits that “it is possible [that] every instance of this was a priest acting *ultra vires* and invalidly,” and that the Church has not “pronounce[d] definitively on whether the Church really does possess the power to bless these kinds of chaste same-sex companionships” (p.17 above). As he points out (page 19 above), other Christian churches have considered and rejected such partnerships, and whatever the nature and status of this “sibling-making” may have been in the past, it is clear that the Church has not (re-)instituted such a liturgy, even as it has restored or created other rites, including the “permanent” diaconate, consecrated virgins, and the ministry of catechist, after the Second Vatican Council.

⁵⁵ Author’s manuscript, p.22 above.

to people who experience same-sex attractions in particular.

“What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature,” the Second Vatican Council explained.⁵⁶ Although respect for the secular state had been stressed by various spiritual authors through the centuries—e.g., St Francis De Sales in the opening of his *Introduction to the Devout Life*—this emphasis on the role of the laity, and its distinction from the consecrated and ordained states, was most welcome in the modern world. It highlights the reality that, *contra* Mr Fawcett and von Balthasar, a specific consecration or vow is not necessary for the pursuit of a “real” vocation:

By their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. ... In this way they may make Christ known to others,

⁵⁶ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* on the Church (1964), no. 31.

especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.

...

If therefore in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God (cf. 2 Pt 1:1). ... Thus, in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ.⁵⁷

Thus, “monasticizing” a same-sex partnership for the sake of making it real to the partners, or visible to the Church, would in effect be robbing the partners and their respective vocations of the specific character that allows them to be “salt”, “light” and “leaven” in the world, among family and friends, co-workers and neighbors.⁵⁸ Mr Fawcett’s proposals include blessing these partnerships in a ceremony that would be “a kind of monastic initiation, or ‘final vows’;” for providing the partners with “a kind of ‘abbot’” in the person of the spiritual director; and for giving “the micro-monastery of this kind of household” a “rule or *regula*” that would “develop the *adelphopoesis* into a kind of

⁵⁷ Idem, no. 31-32.

⁵⁸ See Mt 5:13-14; 13:33.

monastic consecration with its own rule of life.”⁵⁹ But this would be to create a new, independent form of consecrated life, not to assist the persons involved to fulfill their secular, lay vocation.

Where are people who experience same-sex attractions to find the salutary challenges that “help them to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one’s own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and self-giving?”⁶⁰ Such challenges are provided in marriage by complementarity and procreativity, which in turn are enabled and required by the marriage vows of permanence and exclusivity. But these are excluded by the partnerships under consideration here, and their salutary challenges are found somewhere else:

The virtue of chastity blossoms in *friendship*. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends (see Jn 15:15), who has given himself totally to us ... Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendship represents a great good for all. It leads to spiritual communion.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Author’s manuscript, p. 39 above.

⁶⁰ CCC, no. 1619.

⁶¹ CCC, no. 2347.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.⁶²

The kind of friendship that the Church has in mind here is not a consolation prize or second-best love, however little value the secular world may place on it. “One way in which the Church can aid persons with a homosexual inclination,” the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote in 2006, “is by nurturing the bonds of friendship among people. Friendships of various kinds are necessary for a full human life, and they are likewise necessary for those attempting to live chastely in the world.”⁶³ However, the USCCB advises, “it would not be wise for persons with a homosexual inclination to seek friendship exclusively among persons with the same inclination.”⁶⁴ They are explicitly *not* assuming that such people are engaging in or contemplating sexual

⁶² CCC, no. 2359.

⁶³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons With a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (2006), 10.

⁶⁴ *Idem*.

activity.⁶⁵ Yet the idea that two people who experience same-sex attractions should form an exclusive partnership that is solemnized and permanent seems *a fortiori* to be excluded by this insight.

Real friendship presents a salutary challenge precisely, it seems, because *there is no vow* to keep friends together, and *disinterested* friendship is sometimes difficult to maintain. For a disinterested friend says the difficult things his friend needs to hear, not just the pleasantries or flattery he may want to hear. “Charity demands beneficence *and fraternal correction*; it is benevolence; it fosters reciprocity and remains disinterested and generous.”⁶⁶ The “disinterested service” that the *Catechism* describes for parents includes the way that they “guide and correct” their children, “bring[ing] them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).”⁶⁷ Charity that blossoms in friendship is able to endure difficult and challenging conversations, but this is learned by experience, and refined by being tested.

Saint John Henry Newman (1811-90) founded the first English house of the Congregation of the Oratory of

⁶⁵ See *idem.*, 11

⁶⁶ CCC, no. 1829. Emphasis added.

⁶⁷ CCC, no. 2223.

St Philip Neri, a community of secular priests who live together without vows or promises of any kind. In his *Remarks on the Oratorian Vocation*, he explains how the particular way of life found in the Oratory is different from both marriage and consecrated life, and the benefit that this provides for Oratorians:

The members of a religious order often are not members of a given community at all; today they are here, tomorrow there. ... Supposing them to live and die in a community: still, they cannot help it; ... whether they could do it or no, their vow compels them. ...

[H]ow rare is the gift of enduring domestic union without a vow! ... Though marriage does not take place without mutual liking, and deliberate purpose, though the pledge of children is added, yet all this is not enough for the security of the union without a vow. ...

Difficult as it is for man and wife to live together, much more difficult is the domestic association of man with man. Even when they like and respect each other, it is most rare for men to live together and to persevere in doing so. Accordingly, we pray for perseverance.

Hence it is that this gift deserves to be our peculiarity, and the instrument of our perfection. ... [T]o remain firm in a good purpose without vow [is] as fine and acceptable an offering to the Most High as could well be offered ... and as sure a human means as could be selected ... for leading him to that exactness in fulfilling the precepts of the New Law which is the substance of charity and the sure way to heaven.⁶⁸

Certainly, faithful people who experience same-sex attractions can and should form long-lasting, loving, disinterested friendships. But to do this authentically, and to benefit from it, they should do so without a vow, and thus without *adelphopoeisis* or another blessing or solemnization by the Church.

Mr Fawcett is to be commended for his deep concern for Catholics who experience same-sex attractions, and for his creative efforts to help the Church to provide a full, accessible pastoral accompaniment to them. While his proposal starts with identifying a legitimate need, however, it arrives at the wrong solution. This is

⁶⁸ St John Henry Newman, *Newman the Oratorian: His Unpublished Oratory Papers*, with an introduction and notes by Placid Murray (Leominster, U.K.: Gracewing, 2004), 446-47.

not necessarily his fault; many Catholic theologians in recent decades have marked the road in the wrong direction, taking personal experience and practice (*praxis*) to be the basis for theological conclusions (*doxa*), rather than striving to shape the *praxis* of the People of God to be a fuller embrace and living out of the *doxa* revealed by the Word of God. When the principles of Christian anthropology, the Church's theological reflection on the nature and morality of marriage and sexuality, and its appreciation of the legitimate diversity of vocations and states of life are applied to this pastoral question, they demand the opposite conclusion to the one that Mr Fawcett proposes.

