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April 8, 2010

Finding Love in Sweden: A Tale of Theological Transformation in the Church of Sweden

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Abstract

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Finding Love in Sweden explores the civil, social, and religious factors that led to the theological transformation of the Church's of Sweden's understanding of marriage from heterosexual to gender-neutral. The first chapter explores the social influences that influenced the Swedish understanding of marriage. Originally, the Church of Sweden and the state agreed on a heterosexual understanding of marriage. However, with the rise of industrialization, secularization, and the welfare state, civil understandings of marriage and cohabitation began to diverge. By 2009, the state broke from the church's understanding of marriage and legalized same-sex marriage. The church had to decide whether to accept same-sex marriage or give up their rite to marriage all together. Chapter 2 explores the historical importance of marriage in the church, tracing the evolution of marriage from a secular institution to a religious institution. The importance of sex and procreation on early conceptions of marriage impacted the Church's development of a marital theology. Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther each defined marriage in slightly different ways, but all agreed on the necessity of procreation in marriage. This would become a very important lens through which the church would look at marriage scriptures. Chapter 3 returns to the Church of Sweden to look at the impact of previous civil legislation (contraception, homosexuality, and gay civil partnerships) on church doctrine, juxtaposing the slow, methodical nature of the church's doctrinal transformation regarding these issues with the swift nature of the church's transformation of their marriage theology. Chapter 4 discusses the change in theology that opened up the definition of marriage to same-sex couples. Whereas the old theology relied on a procreational definition of marriage in order to read marital passages, the new theology relied on a definition of marriage that focused on love. The rereading of these influential passages provided a space for same-sex marriage in the church. Many questioned the theological foundation for this change, given the speed of the decision-making process. The conclusion of this thesis explores how this new theology might serve as a means of resacramentalizing the institution of marriage.

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For Grandma and Grandpa:
your 60 years of marriage inspired me to search for the same.

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INTRODUCTION

November 18, 2003. It was a blisteringly cold evening in Boston. Wrapped in scarves, mittens, and heavy coats, thick bundled bodies lined the same streets where a scanty patriot army fought against British forces over two hundred thirty years ago. On one side of the street, advocates for gay marriage stood waving rainbow flags, while their opponents stood on the opposite side yelling homophobic chants through clouded breath. Like the patriots defeated the mighty British army so many years before, the underdog won again. Homosexuals throughout the state of Massachusetts, and no doubt the nation, celebrated their right to marry. It seemed as if this were the moment the gay and lesbian movement had worked towards for so many years. The first decision in what was expected to be a domino effect of similar legislation in other states.

However, the optimism and buoyancy of that moment were not to last. Three years after the momentous change, Massachusetts lobbyist groups still tried to bring “legitimacy” back to marriage, hoping to revert to heterosexual marriages again. As recently as 2007, the Massachusetts legislature came together for a constitutional convention to address the legality of gay marriage. Under the gold plated steeple of the Massachusetts state house, scores of people picketed along the street, holding signs reading, “God Hates Fags” and “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” These opponents of gay marriage gloated over God’s goodness and condemned homosexuality.

These negative perspectives of homosexuality from the church were not altogether new to me. Growing up in a small town in Texas, I attended a large conservative Methodist Church, where I learned about the paradoxical nature of Christianity. Church members both introduced me to a loving compassionate God and indoctrinated me into the Church’s heterosexist, patriarchal infrastructure. These lessons stuck with me as my family moved to Boston, Massachusetts in 2001. As a Bostonian, these images and videos of protesters on Beacon Hill provided the background for my high school experience. Messages, first of hope and then of hate, were plastered on the morning newspaper and the nightly news. These conflicting perspectives on marriage and religion made it painfully obvious to me that the LGBT community was not accepted within the church.

Troubled by the discontinuity between my faith and my sexuality, I focused my collegiate studies on the intersection of Christianity and sexuality. During my junior year, I read an article about the Swedish government passing a same-sex marriage law. This article in and of itself was not surprising to me. I had read similar articles from countries

like Belgium, South Africa, Canada, Spain, Norway and the Netherlands. What caught my eye in the article was the final paragraph, where the reporter discussed the Lutheran Church of Sweden's response to the issue. The Church planned to consider revising its liturgy on marriage to include gay marriage. This represented a change in how I envisioned the church and sexuality. I was inspired to travel to Sweden to document the Swedish Church's process of envisioning marriage anew. With funding from the Point Foundation, I made my way to Sweden for a summer of theological reflections on marriage.

May 18, 2009. After getting no sleep on my overnight flight to Stockholm, I welcomed my first night's rest. Unfortunately, it was rudely interrupted by a surprise 3 am sunrise. After bumming around my apartment for a few hours, watching re-runs of *7th Heaven* (with Swedish subtitles), I decided to go out and explore the city. I was still rubbing away crumbles from my eyes as I traversed the cobble stone maze of Gamla Stan, "the Old City." I passed the Royal Palace and coerced a fellow tourist to take my picture next to a Royal Palace Guard. His deep blue uniform and brass helmet paled in comparison to the Queen's guards in England, but he would do for now. I began to walk faster as I felt the pangs of hunger setting in. Fresh off the plane, I hadn't had time to find a grocery store, so I was living off of overpriced restaurant food. As I continued on, I walked down a side alley and found myself in a plaza. In the center, an old fountain dribbled water down its corroded stem. Behind the fountain, a coffee shop buzzed with customers. Walking over to the building, I could smell the fresh brewed coffee.

The day was drizzly and damp, so I bypassed the outside seating for a table inside. The walls were warm amber, like a pumpkin pie fresh out of the oven. As I looked

around, I noticed the artwork on the walls. The paintings were Van Gogh inspired, but in place of flowers and landscapes, these speckles combined to depict the bodies of men having sex. Initially taken aback, I was surprised by the serendipity that I might happen upon Stockholm's only gay coffee shop.

As I waited, I saw a guy at the counter making a drink at the espresso machine. I could only see his face from above the contraption. His jaw was strong and sculpted; his smile, bright and brilliant; his eyes, whirlpool blue. I wondered if my good luck could continue: *would he be my waiter?* Picking up the coffee mug and delivering it to the customer in the back corner, I noticed his body, strong and firm; his strawberry blonde hair, parted to the side. He wore khaki pants rolled up to the ankles, bright green and pink socks, and white Keds. *Odd*, I thought, *but cute*. I opened my journal to start writing about this, my first Swedish boy, when out of nowhere I heard a voice:

“Hej, jag heter Johan, ar ni färdiga att beställa,” he said.

I looked at him and then quickly slammed my journal shut. *Smooth, I know*. With wide eyes, I looked up at him. I literally and figuratively had no clue what to say.

He must have sensed my confusion, because he continued, “English?”

I nodded.

“Hi, I'm Johan. Are you ready to order?” he said.

“Um,” I glanced down at the menu and chose the first thing I saw. “Moccachino Bianco.” I requested quickly, not really sure what I had ordered.

“Anything else?” he asked.

I glanced down again quickly, not wanting to be the cheap American, “And a piece of blueberry pie?”

“Okay, sounds good,” he said, already moving to the kitchen.

By the time he returned a few minutes later, the place had calmed down a bit. Most of the tourists had moved on to the other sites of Stockholm. As he placed the coffee on the table, he asked me what I was doing in Stockholm. I told him about my project looking at the implications of recent Swedish gay marriage legislation on the Lutheran Church of Sweden’s marriage theology. I explained to him how my experience with the church and gay marriage had prompted me to travel to Sweden and explore the Church of Sweden’s process of reconceptualizing marriage. He was not religious, so he did not know much about the Church or its views on marriage outside of what he had read in the newspaper.

As he cleaned up the tables around me, he threw a million questions at me. Having only been in the country for a day, I had no idea how to field them. However, many of his questions burned into my brain and helped to shape the trajectory of my research. I synthesized his questions into a series of topics that I wanted to explore.

- How had the Swedish cultural context of cohabitation paved the way for changes in the religious understandings of marriage?
- Was marriage always a religious institution, and if not, what process led to the strict, sacramentalized understanding of marriage?
- How did the combination of cultural and religious contributions in recent years result in such a swift Church decision on gay marriage?
- How has the Church reformulated its theology of marriage in order to welcome gay marriage?
- And is this new decision on gay marriage theologically sound with the Church’s tradition?

The following is my attempt to address both his questions and my own. This research springs from my own journey in Sweden, growing out of conversations with influential church leaders, activists, train passengers, and a coffee barista named Johan. Their words and my stories populate this text because they provoked my own thinking.

I do not intend this research just for educated theologians or confidently gay Christians, but also for those who have never studied religion or have given up on religion completely, those who can't remember their closets and those who are still reluctant to leave theirs. It is written for those in the LGBT community who buck the heterosexist marriage regime and for those who hope to one day join in marriage. And it is written for the many non-gay family members, friends, and religious leaders who see this opportunity for theological revision as a chance, to both welcome gay and lesbian voices into the marriage discussion, and reenvision marriage without the patriarchy that has come to characterize it. With this project, I hope to bring the Church of Sweden's struggle to the communities that need it most. This research is my contribution to the transformation of marriage from a homophobic, patriarchal institution into a gay-friendly, loving fellowship that better reflects the inclusive nature of Christ on Earth.

1

Deconstructing Marriage: Tracing the Evolution of Various Non-Traditional Forms of Cohabitation in Sweden

May 22, 2009. Slipping on my grungy Converse sneakers and a royal blue Member's Only Jacket, I called to my roommate to hurry up. We had been preparing for this, our first night out in Sweden, for months now. While he primped in the bathroom, I checked on some last minute details for the evening. He emerged from the bathroom in dark, skinny pants and a button down shirt. I laughed, but he insisted that this was the "Scandinavian style." I just smirked, rolled my eyes, and left the apartment. He closed the door as soft as a breath so as not to disturb our new neighbors, and we ventured into the city.

In the shadowed space of the nocturnal kingdom, the stars created connect-the-dots puzzles in the sky. We walked down the street towards the bar, soaking in the sleeping sights with absorbent, tourist eyes. Skirts of light draped from the streetlamps, each a spotlight for our difference, each painting the world a tangerine dream. The wind's cool persuasion charmed my skin, sweeping hair into my eyes, so that I could see the city a little less clearly.

We approached a large crowd of people. They were taller than I was, and their aroma was toxic, sexual and alluring. We climbed the stairs into an eclectic bar. The wallpaper was a rich red with a French floral design. The lights glowed a deep, evil red against the collage of liquor bottles that lined the back wall. Michael Jackson's voice greeted us, singing, "Beat It!" Ignoring the Prince of Pop, I reached for my roommate's hand, and we snuck through the cracks between bodies. I reached the bar area first, so I ordered us both a beer before joining my roommate off to the side to join a pretty mixed bag of people. Expecting a bar full of 20-something year old guys at my first Swedish gay bar, I was surprised to find a diverse clientele. Like vultures, my roommate and I circled the bar area trying to get our bearings.

After a few minutes, a guy named Joachim approached us, and we started chatting. He spent most of his life living outside of Stockholm, but recently moved to Gothenburg for his job. When he asked what I did, I started speaking very slowly.

"I'm...a...student," I said with a hint of ignorance in my voice.

"Why...are...you...talking...so...slowly?" he replied.

I realized immediately that he was very fluent in English despite his Swedish upbringing. I told him that I was studying how the Church of Sweden is reacting to the

Riksdag's (Swedish Government) decision to legalize gay marriage. He laughed. He said that the Church of Sweden is still very much controlled by the state. I asked him if he was a member of the Church. He said that he still paid taxes to the Church, but he never attended services.

I asked him why.

“If I want to get buried in the cemetery or have a child christened in the church, I have to pay taxes. So I pay them like all good Swedes do,” he said.

Pushing through the crowd with the hands of a native, Joachim showed us to a group of his friend standing near the window. He stood next to a very tall, dark Brazilian man with a fashionable vest, a tall blonde haired Swede with a tight fitting black shirt, a beautiful Indian woman with a luscious red tank top, and a nerdy-looking blonde haired guy with a red button down shirt. As we started talking, I discovered that the Indian woman and the nerdy-looking blonde guy had been dating for six years. When I asked if they were considering getting married, they replied that they did not intend to wed. With all the noise, it was difficult to hear them, so I turned to Joachim and asked, “Why are they not going to get married?”

“Not many people these days get married in Sweden. You can apply for the same rights as marriage if you want, but people do not see marriage as a big deal,” he said.

I turned to the couple, so happy and content, and was perplexed.

As we continued talking about nuptials, I could see from the corner of my eye, the Brazilian guy and the blond, Swedish guy pulling each other closer. I noticed that each wore a silver band around his left finger. It turned out they were married. They had a marriage ceremony in Thailand a few years earlier and filed for civil partner status in

Sweden upon arrival back in the country. Thinking of how excited they must be to get officially married in Sweden, I asked if they planned on taking advantage of the new legislation. They said no, and once again I was confused. They felt that by updating their civil partnership to a marriage, they would be demeaning the relationship they had consummated five years earlier. The seven of us continued chatting for a while, when all of a sudden, Joachim waved to a friend across the bar. Joachim opened the circle for his friend, and like the Red Sea, the circle parted.

“This is my friend Johan,” he said to the group.

It was the guy from the coffee shop that I had met earlier in the week. I nudged my roommate and mouthed, *He’s the one*. I tried to make my way over to him casually to say hi, but by the time my casual self got to him, he was grabbing his coat to leave.

“Hey!” I said, as he started putting on his jacket. “I don’t know if you remember me, but we met earlier this week at a coffee shop.”

“I thought you looked familiar,” he said.

“I can’t believe you know Joachim, too,” I said.

“I know! How did you meet him? Doing some ‘research?’” he laughed.

“Maybe,” I said, laughing too.

“I hate to do this, but I really have to run,” he said, apologetic. “I am already late for dinner with some of my friends, but maybe we can hang out sometime?” he recommended. “What’s your number?”

He grabbed a pen from the counter and a cocktail napkin. I wrote down my number and gave it to him.

“I’ll text you,” he said, on his way out.

My stomach was turning as I returned to my roommate, who had left Joachim and his friends and had found a seat near at the bar near the bartender. Too busy to chat, she quickly asked for our orders. My roommate and I both ordered a glass of Falcon, the Swedish national beer. We sat high and mighty on our bar stools. At the same time, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned towards the tap, excited about the possibility of my first interaction with a Swedish guy. But any butterflies in my stomach escaped in a sigh of disappointment when two women greeted me instead. One was short with spiky hair, geometric glasses framing her deep brown eyes. The other sat quite a bit taller and was quite a bit thinner, but her glasses took on a similar right angle symmetry.

“I could not help but overhear that you both speak English,” the shorter woman said with no timidity in her speech.

We nodded.

“Well, if you’re going to come to a Swedish bar, you must know at least one Swedish phrase. ‘En Stor Stark.’ It literally means, ‘Large and Strong.’ If you want a bear, just say, ‘En Stor Stark.’ And just an added bonus, you can even use it to describe guys,” she said.

My roommate and I chuckled. Although these were not the Adonis we had envisaged meeting at the bar, at least we were laughing.

“I’m studying the implications of the recent parliamentary gender-neutral marriage legislation’s affect on the Church of Sweden’s theology,” I told the women.

They returned my response with inquisitive glances and then silence, as if to end the discussion. Already aware from my discussion with Joachim that Swedes did not have a particularly strong (if any) affinity for religion, I tried my best to recover from their

clear ambivalence. I asked them about what they thought about marriage and partnerships and if they were excited about the opportunity to marry, clearly assuming that they were together and committed. Luckily my assumptions were correct so I did not look completely ignorant. They responded in a surprising manner, but one that seemed on par with the evenings conversations.

“We are very excited about the possibility for marriage between people in our community. It shows a great deal of growth on the part of Swedes with regards to homosexuality. However, we live in a Sambo relationships already,” one of the women said.

She must have seen the confusion in my face when she said that, because she paused long enough for me to interject, saying, “Sambo. The only sambo I know is a dance. What is sambo?” The one closest to me shook her head no, explaining to me that they lived in a marriage-like institution called “Sambo.”

“We have all the same rights as a married couple,” she said, “but without all the hassles of marriage or civil partnerships.”

“I couldn’t help but overhear you talking about your research on gay marriage in Sweden,” a voice interrupted from the other side of the bar.

The bartender, Nathalie, mentioned that her friend and colleague, Are, was getting married to his boyfriend of five years in a few weeks. Excited about the possibility of speaking with him, I asked her when he would next work.

“He works tonight! Come with me and I will introduce you to him!” she exclaimed.

Practically dragging me through the labyrinth of tables and chairs in the bar, we approached a tall, muscular guy.

I'm going to go out there and say it—he was stunning. His head was shaved. His eyes were the color of the blueberries that grew in my parent's garden, almost purple in a certain light. His tattoos were intimidating, but his smile was warm and inviting.

“Are, this is...”

“Steven,” I interrupted, realizing I had not formally introduced myself.

“Steven is doing research on gay marriage in Sweden, and I thought you could meet with him,” she said. Are agreed to come over to the bar area after his shift ended.

My roommate had already moved on to the next hot spot with our lesbian sambo friends when he finally came over. Are and I began talking about my project with the church of Sweden and the interviews with church officials I planned on having. However, my interest was more in his story than telling my own. I asked him about his fiancé.

“Well, Kristian and I met four years ago at a club in Stockholm. We dated for a few months and then decided to move in together. We have been together ever since,” he said.

As he spoke, his face turned a deeper shade of red and the corners of his mouth turned up just a bit.

“We have wanted to publically declare our relationship for a while, and after the passage of the gay marriage law, we thought it would be a perfect time to have the ceremony. We are planning our wedding for the end of the summer at the Church a few blocks away. We have a pastor to officiate and all of our closest friends will be there. If you will be around, you should come!”

Surprised by his invitation, I graciously accepted and penciled them into my planner. While Are and Kristian's wedding marks the culmination of a long transformation of the notion of marriage in Sweden that began nearly three hundred years ago, it was not the first noteworthy event to transform the ideas of marriage in Sweden. As many gay people in Sweden prepare to walk down their own aisles to participate in, for the first time, gender-neutral marriage, they will likely not be thinking of the hundreds of years of change that preceded the occasion. They will have their eyes directed down the aisle, because as humans we find it much more convenient to look at our feet as we walk rather than look back and see how far we've come, or how little. I hope that this chapter can serve as a look back at the events that paved the way for gay marriage in Sweden, outlining the myriad legislation that altered the conceptions of marriage most prevalent in Western culture.

The transition from Sweden's agrarian society in the Middle Ages to the industrial society of the 20th century caused a transformation of the Swedish notion of marriage. In the Middle Ages, the church and state held common beliefs on the issue of marriage. However, as industrialization entered Sweden, rational thought split society along the lines of religion. This began a trend that extended to the marriage debate, causing the church and the state to diverge on issues relating to marriage. Industrialization allowed for the establishment of new economic systems, such as the social welfare system, which privileged the new generation with the ability to live independently as individuals and to rethink the construction of marriage in contemporary Swedish society. Since secular society no longer needed heterosexual marriage as a means of survival, the government strayed from its position on marriage as a union between man and woman. Tensions

arose between the church and state. Pressure by the state served as a force in the deconstruction of the social construction of marriage that mandated the union of a man and woman. The historical progression of marriage in Sweden provides an understanding of how the growth of industrialization and Sweden's transition into a welfare state have resulted in new laws that dissolved the traditional form of marriage that focused on couples as an entity and precipitated new understandings of marriage that focused on individuals instead.

Establishing a Social Construction of Marriage

The construction of the term "aktenskap" (marriage) in Sweden was a product of secular and religious institutions coming together in a unifying voice between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The basis for a Swedish social construction of marriage had its roots in the Middle Ages. Although there was little written history before the mid 1700s, social, economic history and church doctrine on sexuality suggest concurrent trends in moving towards unions between a man and a woman. From a secular perspective, unions between a man and a woman would produce offspring that could support the family. From a religious perspective, heterosexual unions constrain people to Lutheran understandings of sexuality. Without any other dominating voices in the discussion regarding marriage, Swedish society in the middle ages used secular and religious tools to understand marriage as between a man and a woman.

During the middle ages, marriage served as a means of bringing different families together into cooperative units. Anne Kutteneuler describes the three key elements of marriage in the Middle Ages in *Love, Cohabitation, and Marriage (LCM)*, saying, "In the middle Ages, marriage was a (1) secular bond, presupposing (2) agreement between the

partners through vows given in front of witnesses, (3) consummated by sexual intercourse.”¹ The appearance of the term “secular bond” suggested that there was not initially a religious component to Swedish marriages. If there had been, then there would be no reason for the distinction. In fact, the wedding consisted of several legal acts, including engagement, betrothal, and the actual wedding, in which the church took no part. She continues, describing marriage as an “agreement” between the partners. Once again, this description lacks religious connotation. The agreement described was one “between the *relatives* of a man and a woman”² rather than between the spouses themselves (or the spouses and a deity). This was a business affair for the families. A marriage act not only served as a union between two individuals, but more importantly, served as economic leveraging for families. Finally, the relationships was consummated through sexual intercourse. Since sex was saved for procreation only, the consummation of a relationship through sex implicitly required that the two persons be of opposite sex. These procreative actions would become much more important to the church as it began defining marriage. Overall, these early requirements for marriage did not require a relationship for marriage. All that was necessary was a man and a woman.

In addition, the economy of the Middle Ages reinforced the precedence for a male-female conception of marriage, since it relied on a male-female construction in order to create large, supportive families. As a peasant society dominated by small farms and large families, the Swedish household was the natural unit for production,

¹ Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 138

² Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 138

reproduction, and the care for elderly and sick. As a result, “it was natural for the state to promote and protect cohabitation between men and women to ensure sufficient childbirths and to provide labor for all tasks needed.”³ The state regulated a secular institution of marriage that relied on a union between procreating humans, that is men and women. These unions were community-driven rather than individual-driven. Each person in the family relied on the others in order to survive: young children relied on parents for sustenance; parents relied on older children for help on the farm; and older parents relied on children to take care of them in their old age. In this way, the family unit became a close knit, mutually dependent group. Still, these relationships relied solely on the sex of the individual rather than the relationship of the couple.

Later, as the medieval period moved into the modern period, protestant views dominated. Christian ideas of sexuality were disseminated through Sweden, leading to a more conservative understanding of marriage and relationships. In *LCM*, Eva Österberg describes the period, saying, “Simply put, and founded on substantial historical evidence, one can well argue that there was a fundamentalist Protestant control on sexuality during the 17th and 18th centuries in Sweden which was stricter than in most countries and lacked comparison in contemporary Europe except for the Nordic countries.”⁴ Österberg’s use of fundamentalist here may be anachronistic or simply a misinterpretation. While these perspectives may now constitute fundamentalist Christian perspectives, at the time, it was likely that this was the popular Christian opinion.

³ Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53.

⁴ Österberg, Eva. "Church, Marriage, and the Construction of 'Normality': Historical Forms of Cohabitation." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 45-54. pp. 46

This strong hold by the church resulted in a transformation of marriage from a strictly secular to a more religious institution that revolved around procreation. These Christian notions of marriage led to a “renaissance in defense of heterosexual marriage among influential social circles. It was typical that masturbation was regarded as a highly threatening phenomenon, just as homosexuality. Unrelated to procreation, both were seen as sickly, asocial, and non-normal.”⁵ The church’s association of marriage with sexual activity provided the foundation for their understanding of marriage as strictly heterosexual. The church’s emphasis on procreation reinforced the importance of unions between man and woman.

There is a way in which both the church and the economic status of the agrarian state established the social construction of heterosexual marriage in Sweden. The Church’s newfound interest in the act of marriage (as a means for curtailing ‘unnatural activities’) transformed marriage from a purely secular institution to a secular/religious institution; it also enforced the social construction of marriage as being between a man and a woman.

This combination of factors led to the calcification of the social construction of marriage in the form of laws about marriage. Anne Kutteneuler looks back historically to find that, “For many centuries, it was possible to choose to contract marriage in the older, traditional [secular] way or by church ceremony.”⁶ However, by 1734, the government passed a law requiring that every couple have a church wedding in order for

⁵ Österberg, Eva. "Church, Marriage, and the Construction of 'Normality': Historical Forms of Cohabitation." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 45-54. pp. 47

⁶ Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 139

the union to carry full legal effects. It was not until 1908 that the 1734 law was revised, introducing a free choice between church and civil weddings. The government drafted a marriage code, which defined matrimony as between a man and a woman by a wedding ceremony. They described the appropriate facilitators of a marriage as,

“Four kinds of people... 1) a legally trained judge in a district court of law; 2) any person so authorized by the County Administration (Länsstyrelsen); 3) a priest in the Church of Sweden; 4) a priest or other minister in another denomination or religious group which has received the permission of the Judicial Board for Public lands and Funds (Kammarkollegiet) to perform weddings.”⁷

These options show a joining together of the secular and religious understandings of marriage. When secular and religious intentions meet, we see the formation of the tradition of heterosexual marriage. Since there was no push back from other institutions, the equation of “marriage equals man plus woman” remained a paradigm. When someone spoke of marriage, Swedes could go through the equation; they automatically envisioned a man and a woman, because there were no people speaking out against these notions. Both the church, with its sexual agenda, and the State, with its economic agenda, were pushing towards the same goal, if for very different reasons. However, as social conditions changed, the church and the state no longer saw eye to eye on the issue of marriage.

Accompanying the introduction of this new system was a conversation to decide if the civil ceremony should be mandatory while the religious ceremony should be supplementary. This idea was rejected because it was possible that people in the countryside might have difficulty finding places to perform civil weddings. Conveniently,

⁷ Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 139

there were churches throughout the Swedish countryside.⁸ The idea of mandatory civil marriages resurfaced once again in the 1970's. The government polled the citizens, and some suggested doing away with all weddings. These challenges by the state on the church reflect the state's changing understanding of marriage. The state no longer saw marriage as needed for maintaining a healthy citizenry. People had other means for survival, so the state wanted to promote equality and individuality, rather than marriage. Despite attempts to recognize civil marriages as the only legal form of cohabitation, the Church maintained its control over the institution of marriage.

The Declining Importance of Marriage in Sweden

Although once unified under the understanding that marriage should be between a man and a woman, social and economic conditions in Sweden shifted, leading to the divergence of secular and religious conceptions of marriage. Whereas the religious institutions maintained their stance on gay marriage, the government began a process of breaking down the traditional construction of marriage, emphasizing the individuals within the marriage, rather than the couple as an entity.

Two forces have sustained the decline of marriage in Sweden: secularization and the development of the comprehensive welfare system. If traditional religious notions imprisoned sex within marriage and procreation, then secularism established a new sexual paradigm that liberated sex and allowed for greater sexual freedom. This required neither a partner nor a long-term commitment. Secularization deemphasized the coupling of partnership and sexual activity. With the rise of industrialization in the 18th and 19th centuries, the nuclear family lost some of its importance. As industrialization and social

⁸ Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 139

mobility increased, “new towns and factories sprang up, more and more women had their own incomes, and divorces and freer alliances.”⁹ With more opportunities for individuals to work independent of the family farm and earn separate wages, Swedes were less invested in family, finding other ways to survive. Unfortunately, Swedish women were still reliant on the family. Although farm women could contribute to the economy, without birth control, they still needed the family in order to support the consequences of sex.

The development of the comprehensive welfare system further changed the function of marriage, as the state took over responsibility for caring for children, the sick, and the elderly. Tomasson argues, “The basic unit of the Swedish welfare state is the individual, not the family. One is taxed as an individual; there is no joint filing.”¹⁰ Further, child allowances from the government were paid to one parent, usually the mother, rather than the household. This development benefited women in particular, allowing them to become financially independent of men. By focusing on the equality of the sexes, the government has contributed to the declining importance of marriage, and the growing trend of individualism in Sweden. This shift is directly correlated to the changes in economic understandings in Sweden.

After the instatement of the Marriage Code in 1908, there was a significant decline in the importance of marriage. In 1998, Richard F. Tomasson conducted a study on Swedish unions to determine the value of marriage in the Nordic country. He found a startling discrepancy in the number of marriages in the 1940’s as compared to the 1990’s.

⁹ Österberg, Eva. "Church, Marriage, and the Construction of 'Normality': Historical Forms of Cohabitation." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 45-54. pp. 47

¹⁰ Tomasson, Richard F. Modern Sweden: The Declining Importance of Marriage. *Scandinavian Review*, Autumn 1998.

In the 1940's, Sweden averaged 63,000 marriages per year for a population of 6.5 million people. In 1997, there were 32,000 marriages performed for a population of 9 million people. Tomasson claims, "No country in the world with adequate marriage statistics has ever reported a marriage rate as low as 3.6 per 1000 population."¹¹ These results speak for themselves. Despite an increase of approximately 2.5 million people over 50 years, there were only half as many marriages. On some level, this decline might be blamed on industrialization, but that argument would not explain why the statistics were so low in comparison to other western, industrial nations of the time. These suggest that Swedes no longer valued marriage in the same way as other countries or had found new ways of establishing long term relationships with others.

The welfare state and the marriage code in Sweden reflected the recent importance placed on the individuals involved in marriage rather than the institution of marriage. The code followed a basic rule of a neutrality towards formal family forms and relationships. Swedish family law is divided into two forms: the Marriage Code and the Code relating to Parents, Guardians, and Children.¹² The marriage code (1987) regulates the relationship between spouses, whereas the Code Relating to Parents, Guardians, and Children (1983) dictates the proper relationship between parents and children. Ulla Björnberg describes the laws, saying, "The modernity of Swedish family forms is supported by a family law which regulates family forms as neutral, that is, the law is basically aiming at finding solutions to practical problems which largely occur when

¹¹ Tomasson, Richard F. "Modern Sweden: The Declining Importance of Marriage." *Scandinavian Review*, Autumn 1998.

¹² Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. pp. 352

families dissolve.”¹³ According to Björnberg, the laws were not intended to protect the institution of marriage so much as the people involved in the marriage. This was a shift in the importance of marriage. Whereas original understandings of marriage saw the couples as one body—man and woman—this new understanding of marriage recognized partners as individuals. This understanding primarily focused on two people who happen to connect their financial lives together for an indefinite period. The laws serve to protect each partner financially, as well as any children. Most importantly, the State viewed marriage as less important than the individuals.

Interestingly, recent statistics suggest that marriage is no longer the most predominate form of cohabiting. Bjornberg describes the decreased important of marriage through statistics, saying, “From 1975 to 1990, the proportion of married couples with children decreased by 10% (205,000 [marriages]). During the same period the proportion of couples who were married decreased by roughly 20%.”¹⁴ These statistics suggested that new life patterns arose that did not require marriage for economic stability or for the birthing of legitimate children. Statisticians found that “more than 50% of children in Sweden are born to non-married parents.”¹⁵ The influx of births out of wedlock implies a shift in the importance of marriage. People seemed to be more comfortable committing to someone informally, or perhaps did not respect the institution of marriage as they once did. Procreative sex was not just limited to marriage any longer.

¹³ Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. 358

¹⁴ Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. 351

¹⁵ Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. 351

This feeling of comfort may be most directly related to the lack of economic and political benefits provided to married couples. A study completed in the early 1980s suggested that a great majority of cohabiting partners believed that there was no reason to get married for economic reasons, “resisting marriage for ideological and emotional reasons and declar[ing] that there was no need for a formal document making their wish to have a union explicit.”¹⁶ Instead, they founded their relationship on the informal agreement between the partners.

The vestiges of the social importance of marriage remained, even contemporaneously. Those who ultimately got married, did so in order to “present themselves in public as having formed a real family.”¹⁷ Marriage still provided a certain public accreditation that other forms of cohabitation did not. These social understandings are like a memory of the social construction of marriage, in which people were not considered in a legitimate and committed relationship until they were married.

The Deconstruction of the Social Construction of Marriage

As the government prioritized its citizens over the institution of marriage, it began acknowledging different forms of relationship. In 1987, Riksdag passed the *Joint Homes Act*, which regulated the relationships between partners who were living in “relationships similar to marriage,”¹⁸ protecting the joint dwelling and household goods of “samboende”—those who are cohabiting persons. Within a “sambo” relationship, a couple received many of the same economic benefits as a married couple. The only legal

¹⁶ Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. 352

¹⁷ Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. 353

¹⁸ Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. 352

difference between marriage and sambo was that samboendes do not receive the same inheritance rights as a married couple (as limited as those benefits were). This required that each individual in sambo write a will leaving his or her belongings to the other person. The *Joint Homes Act* was a further manifestation of the neutrality principle implemented on marriage by the Swedish government, allowing individuals “to develop their personal lives as their own will, to choose a living arrangement and to determine the ethical norms for their family life.”¹⁹ The role and form of a family became much less clear, as the laws were developed in order to appeal to and be accepted by almost all individuals.

Swedish proponents of gay and lesbian activists used the government’s tendency towards neutrality in order to fight for gender-neutral marriage. Furthermore, *Article 12* in the European Convention on Human Rights, which is part of the existing Swedish law, read, “Men and women of marriageable age have the *right* to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right”²⁰ (emphasis mine). Contracting marriage was therefore not merely voluntary, it was a right. This argument led to the passage of the *Registered Partnership Act* of 1995, which defined partnership as “a marriage-like relationship with the same legal rights and duties as heterosexual marriage.”²¹ The term “marriage-like” resonates with the earlier *Joint Homes* legislation from 1987. Both civically validated a non-traditional marriage form and deconstructed the social construction of marriage. While sambo relationships

¹⁹ Björnberg, Ulla. Cohabitation and Marriage in Sweden-Does Family Form Matter? *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* **15**, (2001), 350-362. 353

²⁰ Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 147

²¹ Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 140

received all the rights of marriage except inheritance rights, civil partnerships were privy to all the same regulations applicable to married spouses, including, “dissolving marriages, division of joint property, and spouses economic relationship.”²² Civil partnerships additionally received the same inheritance code as married couples, unlike Sambo couples. Whether or not sambo had a direct bearing on the civil partnership legislation in 1995, it seemed likely that there was at least an indirect correlation between the two. People’s perceptions of cohabitation changed dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in an environment able to accept such official relationships.

For nearly ten years, the issue of gay cohabitation remained at a grass roots level. Then, in August 2006, a parliamentary committee described the civil union law as outdated and recommended that the government allow full same-sex marriage.²³ This began a debate within the nation of Sweden over the issue of gay marriage. At that time a public opinion poll indicated that 46 percent of Swedes supported gay marriage, while 31 percent opposed.²⁴ A second recommendation came out early in 2007 that advocated for allowing same-sex marriage. Individual officials of religious institutions could be exempt from performing such marriages if they were against it.²⁵ This was closely followed by a government report written by former Chancellor of Justice Hans Regner in which he

²² Kutteneuler, Anne. "The Legal Provisions Concerning Marriage and Partnership, and the Forthcoming Review of These." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 138-53. pp. 140

²³ "Same-sex Marriage in Sweden." *Language Translation | Translate Free Online*. Web. 18 Oct. 2009. <http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Same-sex_marriage_in_Sweden/2>.

²⁴ "Sweden Considers Gay Marriage." *GAYTWOGETHER*. Web. 17 Oct. 2009. <http://gaytwogether.typepad.com/gaytwogether/2006/08/sweden_consider.html#more>.

²⁵ "Same-sex Marriage in Sweden." *Language Translation | Translate Free Online*. Web. 18 Oct. 2009. <http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Same-sex_marriage_in_Sweden/2>.

agreed that marriage should be extended to same-sex couples.²⁶ Initially, the extremely liberal parties accepted this new legislation, but it was not until October 2007 that the Green, Left, Moderates and Social democratic parties agreed to join forces in order to legalize same-sex marriage. This left the Christian Democrats as the only party not to back the decision. For nearly a year, parliament worked on a compromise for the situation. In October 2008, after negotiations broke down, the government prepared to present its bill to a free vote.²⁷ On January 21, 2009, a bill was introduced in the Swedish parliament to make the legal concept of marriage gender neutral.²⁸ By April of the same year, the bill passed with 261 votes in favor, 22 votes against, and 16 in abstentions.²⁹ Finally, on May 1, 2009, Sweden celebrated its first gender-neutral marriages.³⁰

In the transformation over the last three hundred years, the needs of Swedish citizens have changed, resulting in changed understandings of marriage. With a social welfare state that provided aid for bringing up children and caring for the sick and elderly, large families were no longer a necessity for survival. Having no need for large families, women had fewer babies, family sizes decreased, and couples adopted children from other countries rather than have their own. Marriage, it could be argued, was needed neither for the procreation of children, nor for social protection. In fact, the Swedes began adopting their own creative forms of cohabitation. They based these relationships

²⁶ "Same-sex Marriage in Sweden." *Language Translation | Translate Free Online*. Web. 18 Oct. 2009. <http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Same-sex_marriage_in_Sweden/2>.

²⁷ "Left Party: 'force Pastors to Perform Gay Weddings' - The Local." *The Local - Sweden's News in English*. Web. 15 Oct. 2009. <<http://www.thelocal.se/15612/20081111/>>.

²⁸ "Sweden to Allow Gay Marriage in May - The Local." *The Local - Sweden's News in English*. Web. 15 Oct. 2009. <<http://www.thelocal.se/17050/20090121/>>.

²⁹ "Sweden Passes Same-sex Marriage Law - CNN.com." *CNN.com International - Breaking, World, Business, Sports, Entertainment and Video News*. Web. 15 Oct. 2009. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/04/01/sweden.samesex/index.html>>.

³⁰ "Swedish Gays Made to Wait for Church Wedding - The Local." *The Local - Sweden's News in English*. Web. 15 Oct. 2009. <<http://www.thelocal.se/19206/20090503/>>.

solely on the relationships between partners rather than on public declaration and meeting religious criteria.

With the passage of the gay marriage legislation and the first gay weddings, it seemed as though this chapter of Swedish history was ending. However huge questions still remained in my mind about how the church would respond to the Parliamentary decision. Would they choose to embrace gay marriage and maintain their ability to celebrate straight marriages as well? Or would they decide to relinquish their ability to perform legal marriages, opting for a form of blessing instead. In order to answer these questions, I first needed to understand why marriage was such an important institution for the church.

2

Sacramentalizing Marriage:

A Historical Analysis of the Transformation of Marriage

June 15, 2009. It was heavier than I imagined. Just bigger than a baseball, the cube-shaped stone was rough around the edges, like the Christians who threw them.

“It’s the symbol of the conservative party,” she said, following the trajectory of my eyes, still softened by sleep, down to the carefully painted green diamond with an arrow pointing up—towards heaven no doubt.

“Ten years ago I came in to work to find shards of glass everywhere and ten or twelve of these rocks lying on the floor.” she said.

I was in the offices of the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights, hoping that they might help me locate influential leaders in the church's journey towards gay marriage. Instead, I found myself face to face, or perhaps chest to face, with a five foot tall woman with a crimson and yellow rugby shirt and ruby red lesbian clogs. Her eyes were a crisp blue that reminded me of glaciers and the northern seas; her hair the color of fire.

“They threw those rocks into the windows,” she said. They must have felt threatened by the positive advances we had made towards equality. It was a devastating blow for the entire organization. Things seemed to be advancing so well, and then to receive such a blatant act of intolerance from a religious group was hard to take. After a year of recovery and new windows in all the frames, we started to forget about the incident.”

“In an effort to never forget what we were fighting against, we placed a rock in each employee's office to remind them of that day and all the challenges we still face. We put a rainbow cut out at the end of each arrow to symbolize the ways in which we are transforming the evil actions against gays in Sweden into a motivating force for change.” All the rage she felt when looking at the rock had to be transformed into words and actions that spread like balm, invisible comfort for wounds too broad to see. As I placed the rock back on the shelf near her window, I glanced through the blinds and tried to imagine one of the pedestrians, weaving through the parade of shopping bags, heaving a rock through the window at me. Even with all the supposed liberalism of Sweden, I realized the strong grasp Christianity still had over sexuality.

“You know I knew you were gay from the first second I saw you,” she interjected, slicing through the silence that had settled on our shoulders as I stared out the window. Confused by this statement and a little startled by her openness, I shrugged off her comment.

“I mean this is a gay organization isn’t it?” I said, unimpressed by her observation.

“Obviously, but I saw you earlier today. You were on the tunnelbana with a friend. I turned to my colleague Nikolas. As soon as I mentioned you too, he immediately agreed that you were both gay American tourists. Then you pulled out your gay map and confirmed our speculation,” she said.

“Glad I could be of service,” I grunted, still staring out the window at the pedestrians below. My phone vibrated as she kept talking. It was a text from Johan:
Grass beach at 2?

Absolutely, I responded.

“Speaking of Nikolas, you must meet him!” she said eagerly, bringing me back into the conversation. She grabbed her coffee cup and prodding me down the hall. We turned into an office with modern décor—white washed wood and stainless steel. Slumped forwards and with his attention focused on something on his desk, I was first greeted by my own reflection bouncing off his cleanly shaven head. As we moved closer, his head lifted enough to reveal a penis shaped contraption.

“Nikolas, this is Steven Dry, a student doing research on gay marriage and the church of Sweden,” she introduced. With a final twist, the device began to vibrate and I had a strange feeling I had come in at the wrong time.

“Success!” he proclaimed, finally looking up from his fondlings. He was startled by our appearance.

Clearing her throat, Marie repeated, “Nikolas, this is Steven Dry, a student doing research on gay marriage and the church of Sweden.”

“Great to meet you Steven,” he said, standing up slightly and outstretching the same hand with which he had been holding the dildo. Trying not to be rude, I met his hand with mine, quickly releasing and whipping my hand on my jeans.

Sensing my concern, Nik chuckled and reassured me, “Don’t worry, we clean them every few days.”

“Why are you playing with...” my voice trailed off in embarrassment.

“With Dildos?” he completed my sentence with confidence. “It’s my job. I am in charge of creating sexual awareness workshops in Stockholm. We encourage experimentation and a sex-positive attitude.”

“Sex-what?” I interrupted.

“Sex-positive. We try to embrace positive attitudes towards an open sexuality with few limits.” He responded. “We encourage people to experiment, not only with differently sexed partners, but with toys and techniques. Of course I have to do the boring stuff too, like sex education and HIV prevention. But my goal is to take away the traditional stigma around sex, that way people can feel comfortable with themselves and enjoy their sexuality.”

“And people...go to these...talks?” I said with apprehension. I had grown up in an environment that equated sexual deviance with shame, rejection and failure. I was brought up to believe that there was only one right way to get from point A to point B in

sex, which began with marriage and ended with children. As for sex toys, I had never even seen a sex toy before. So to walk in to the office of a complete stranger feeling up a rubber penis with veins candicaning their way up the shaft, made me feel, well, uncomfortable.

“Of course they do! Our goal at RFSL is to transform people like you, timid around sex, into humans comfortable with their sexuality. One of the biggest sexual problems facing Swedish society is undereducated people, people who don’t understand how to have safe sex. Although Sweden has mandatory sex education in public schools, people still feel uneasy talking about sex and exploring their sexuality,” he said.

I agreed. Many people, especially those in the church, shoved the idea of sex out of their minds. They denied it. Like when you’re a kid and you closed your eyes and believed that you were invisible. If you didn’t say out loud, “I’m a sexual person,” you weren’t. However, if you admitted to yourself that you were sexual, then you had to deal with it. This had been my technique for coping with my sexuality for many years.

“People who avoid sex never learn the appropriate ways to have safe sex, so they endanger themselves and their partners. RFSL prepare people to enjoy their sexual experiences safely, if it be now or in the future,” he continued.

We chatted as he packed up his leather shoulder bag, buckled the brass clasps and turned off his computer.

“Are you headed to the tunnelbana?” he asked.

“Indeed” I replied, immediately embarrassed by my word choice, “I’m heading to Kungsholmen to meet a friend at the grass beach.” I was only half sure where I was going.

When we got down to the metro station, I followed him to the Norsborg platform. “Oh no, I’m heading home. Your train is over there,” pointing towards an approaching train. As I turned to get on walk towards the train, he invited me to attend his next educational talk. I pulled out the courtesy “thank you” and the non-committal, “we’ll see,” which was just a nice way of saying “no.” As my train pulled up, I walked through the automatic doors. Passing through through the doors, I exhaled the breath I didn’t realize I had been holding. *Safe sex...more like safe from sex.*

I found a seat next to the window, a prime people watching location for when we entered the next station. An elderly woman sat down next to me. Her hands were large and swollen at the knuckles; her face was lined, like the inner rings of a weeping willow, but she seemed to be hunched over in prayer rather than mourning. I turned my head towards the window to watch the stonewalls of the metro fly past, reminding me of the stone throwers I had heard about earlier in the day.

“Hej! Hur står det till?” she said. I assumed she must have seen a friend across the aisle, but when I turned my head back in her direction, I met her eyes. They were pale gray like nightfall at the edge of winter, cold and icy. Yet, her voice was warm and soothing. My brain whizzed through my Swedish vocabulary, which didn’t take long. I admitted defeat before I even attempted a phrase.

“I don’t speak Swedish, sorry.” I responded.

“Oh, you are a tourist?” she said.

Nodding, I explained that I was doing research on the Church of Sweden and gay marriage. She continued to nod throughout my quick spiel, as if agreeing with everything I was saying.

“Interesting. You know my ex-husband has been a priest in the Lutheran church for 30 years. He would probably know a great deal about what is going on with the church on this issue,” she said.

“Really? Priests can marry?” I said, clearly confused.

“Well, they can in the Lutheran Church. I married one for twenty years in fact,” she responded. “He’s been pretty active in the marriage discussion in his area.”

“Do you think he’d be willing to speak with me?” I asked.

She shrugged, “He never could make time to speak with me,” she grumbled under her breath.

“I’m sure he could,” she said in a more audible volume.

“Where do you guys live? Maybe we can meet for an interview sometime,” I suggested.

“Well *we* don’t live anywhere. He’s my ex. We divorced ten years ago. But *he* lives in central Sweden,” she informed.

“Divorced?” I said. First, a priest could marry and now he could divorce as well?

“Yes,” she responded, “I will give you send you his email. Do you have a piece of paper and a pen?”

I pulled out a scrap of paper and she scribbled something down. As she finished, the train pulled into another station, “T-Centralen.” I wanted to hear more, but my stop had come. I thanked her for the contact, slipped the paper into my pocket, and exited the train.

Following the mass parade of beach bags, I funneled into the escalator headed up to the street. I walked along the path that traced the harbor, passed the floating bar, Malar

Paviljongen, and found Johan sitting on a beach towel...with his friend Daniel. From his text, I hadn't expected any other visitors; or perhaps that was just wishful thinking. The boys both had their shirts off and were lying on towels near the water.

Daniel and I became quick friends. Johan told him about my interest in the Church of Sweden, and Daniel was quick to tell me that he was one of only 5,000 Jews in Sweden. I was surprised by such a low number.

“Why are you so interested in the Church?” Daniel asked.

“Well, they could be the first church in the world to officially endorse gay marriage.” I said.

“Oh, the gays and church!” he responded cheekily. “They’re goin’ to the chapel and they’re gonna get married,” he began to sing.

I laughed as I took off my shirt and headed into the water.

Daniel and Johan followed me in, Johan joining Daniel’s chorus, “We’re goin’ to the chapel and we’re, gonna get married. Gee, I really love you and we’re gonna get married, Goin’ to the chapel of love.”

With the help of the Dixie Cups, Johan and Daniel reminded me of the commonplace understanding of marriage to which many westerners relate. Many in the Christian dominated Western society connect marriage with religion, because of several historical factors that will be explained in this chapter. Marriage actually began as a secular, Roman institution, but after a long struggle with the secular empires, the church took control of marriage. Then, when Protestant Christian denominations criticized the Catholic Church for its positions on sexuality, marriage became the field on which they fought for power. The history of marriage is far from the history of flower girls and long

flowing dresses that one might expect. Instead, the history of marriage in the Catholic Church is the history of a struggle between various empires and the Catholic Church, followed by an equally intense battle for power between the Catholic Church and other Protestant denominations. Each group vied for total power over sexuality and religion. The historical transition of “marriage as a prison” to “marriage as a fort” directly impacts how the church of Sweden treats marriage in the 20th century. This chapter will trace the evolution of marriage from a secular understanding of marriage to a religious understanding of marriage, paying close attention to the civic pressures that shaped the sacramentalization of marriage in the Church.³¹

During the Roman Empire—for our purposes prior to 312 AD—marriage was a civil intuition that had almost no connection with the Church. Similar to pre-Christian marriages in Sweden discussed in Chapter 1, Roman marriages were essentially property relationships between families. They were purely civil arrangement without the involvement of clergy. In describing early weddings, Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor writes, “Marriages were basically property arrangements by which a man purchased a woman from her father or some other family.”³² Love was not necessary for this understanding of marriage. Instead, “the arrangements involved a mutual exchange of gifts, spoken and sometimes written agreements between the groom and the bride’s guardian.”³³ The bride had no voice in the wedding process, being subjected to the decision between her father

³¹ My hope for this chapter is to provide an overview of the process of sacramentalization, however this should not be taken as an exhaustive account of the history. The text should give a flavor for the history of marriage in the church, but relies on only a handful of texts and theologians. The chapter relies heavily on the works of secondary sources, because the history and texts are vast and treatment of these texts would deserve a thesis of its own. Instead, this chapter should serve to contextualize the discussions of marriage theology in subsequent chapters, covering the material in broad strokes.

³² Martos, Joseph. “From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage.” *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 251

³³ Martos, Joseph. “From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage.” *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 251

and the groom-to-be. The bride was a piece of “property.” This was the beginning of a long tradition of women being objects within marriage, a fact that would become integral in the shaping of new theological understandings of marriage.

Despite a clear state control over marriage during the reign of Constantine in the Roman Empire, the Church began to take on more responsibility after Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 A.D. In the early years of the empire, the “church hardly had the elbowroom to implement its view of marriage,”³⁴ however Constantine’s conversion initiated a radical change in the Church’s interaction with marriage. The government supported the church more than before. This resulted in a slight loosening of the State’s grip on marriage. Still, it was clear that jurisdiction over marriage remained in the hands of the secular authorities.

Churchmen were called upon more and more to decide issues within marriage. The decisions passed and implemented by the councils in Verneuill and Bavaria regarding marriage suggested that the Church had begun a reconnaissance of marriage. The regional council of Verneuill consecrated the relationship between civil society and marriage in the late eighth century, when they “decreed that both nobles and commoners should have public weddings and a similar council in Bavaria instructed priests to make sure that people who wanted to marry were legally free to do so.”³⁵ Both of these councils were affiliated with the Church, and each issued a mandate on marriage. This showed a general trajectory towards more church control over marriage. However, their orders continued to perpetuate secular power: the first requiring all people to marry in

³⁴ Selderhuis, H.J. “The Theory and Practice of Marriage on the Eve of the Reformation.” *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 234

³⁵ Martos, Joseph. “From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage.” *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 253

public, and the second instructing priests that people must meet secular legality in order to get married.

Charlemagne's empire sustained the secular nature of marriage, holding strong to its jurisdiction of marriage. Evidence of the secular strong hold on marriage could be found in the 802 A.D. marriage law, passed by Charlemagne, which required all proposed marriages to be examined for legal restrictions. The civil realm had established particular rules regarding marriage and incorporated them into their permanent set of laws.

But a slow transition to religious power occurred as a result of a weakened state. The weakened state meant that the church's "authority grew as the regular judicial system collapsed."³⁶ As Odozo describes, the Church's first actions with the Church were not drastic. Instead, the churchmen initially, "adopted the prevailing Roman customs, although they sometimes added prohibitions that were found in the Old Testament."³⁷ Since Roman marriages were about property and families, early religious understandings of marriage were focused on the sex of the partners rather than their mutual love.

More and more people went to the Church for marriage help, and "eventually the secular courts came to be bypassed altogether, and by the year 1090 all marriages in Europe effectively came under the jurisdictional power of the church."³⁸ The church's ability to hold together the pieces of a crumbling empire was the passing on of power from the state to the church with regards to marriage. Marriage became a marker by which historians could gauge the Church's influence in the world, as the Church and

³⁶ Martos, Joseph. "From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage." *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 251

³⁷ Martos, Joseph. "From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage." *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 251

³⁸ Martos, Joseph. "From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage." *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 253

State continued to jostle over control of marriage. They fought this battle on the field of marriage. While the state was originally successful, the church would ultimately take control over marriage.

Augustine: Marriage as a Prison

But why was marriage so important to the Catholic Church? What motivation did the church have for taking over control of marriage? Catholic understandings of marriage during these early transitory times revolved around a short, inflammatory, three letter word: s-e-x. And who better to inform the masses than the sultan of sex himself, St. Augustine. Augustine is one of the most noteworthy theologians to write about marriage containing sex. He developed a theology about sex and marriage that became fixed into Christian dogma, making “the moral theology of what we call western Christianity—the medieval “Catholic” church and all the European churches that descended from it—is strictly inconceivable without Augustine.”³⁹ As Jordan points out, it was Augustine’s understanding of moral theology—namely sex—that facilitated the Church’s acquisition of marriage.

Augustine’s personal experience with sex informs his negative understanding of sexuality. In his *Confessions* and *Soliloquies*, Augustine finds nothing spiritual, rational, or gracious in his acts of sexually relating with his partners. During a conversation with “Reason,” Reason asks Augustine, “What about a wife? Would not it be nice sometimes to have a beautiful, modest compliant woman, one who is well-read or whom you could easily teach, one without too much of a dowry.”⁴⁰ Despite the enticing offer, Augustine

³⁹ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 109

⁴⁰ Robert, Obach. *The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse: From St. Paul to Pope John Paul II*. Lanham: Lexington, 2009. 33

responds, “I have decided that there is nothing I should avoid as much as sex.”⁴¹

According to Augustine, humans should avoid sex if possible. Augustine’s biggest qualm about sex was that people who have sex gave into the pleasures of the flesh. He believed that focusing on bodily pleasures distracted Christians from their relationships with God. By the end of the fifth century, Augustine calcified the strict doctrine that only procreative sexual intercourse was acceptable.

If the only acceptable form of sex was procreative, and procreation existed almost exclusively within marriage, then Augustine came to the natural conclusion that sex belonged within marriage. Augustine suggests, “Christians can enter into marriage for the sake of procreating children and in order to enjoy the special bond between husband and wife.”⁴² Augustine argued that sex was a social problem that should be limited. However as Mark Jordan points out, even “Sex within marriage escapes sin only so far as it satisfies a complex set of criteria. These criteria are meant to remove from sex the sinfulness of unbridled lust, the effects of disordered eros.”⁴³ Like a prison keeps dangerous criminals separated from innocent people, Augustine conceives of marriage as a container that separates the dangerous sin of sex from innocent Christians. However, just as a prison does not condone criminality for the masses, neither did Augustine intend for marriage to serve as a “get into bed free” card in a game of sex-opoly. In fact, Augustine was quick to reiterate his original position “that celibacy is the preferable

⁴¹ Robert, Obach. *The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse: From St. Paul to Pope John Paul II*. Lanham: Lexington, 2009. 33

⁴² Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002.109

⁴³ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002.113

state.”⁴⁴ So Augustine limits the concession to procreation as soon as he makes it, suggesting that the most admirable state is Christian continence and any Christian who can keep continence should.

However, if we follow this logic carefully, then we discover a problem with Augustine’s understanding of marriage: if marital sex is morally wrong and Christian marriage is constructed to protect Christians from the sin of sex, then how could marriage ever be a good thing, let alone a sacrament? Augustine had to carefully show that marriage could be good even though it harbored concupiscence (lust), one of the evil effects of sin. In answering this conundrum, Augustine proposes three “Goods of Marriage:” offspring, fidelity, and sacrament.

Augustine first describes marriage as the means to perpetuate the human race, saying, “For what food is to the conservation of the man, this sexual intercourse is unto the conservation of the race.”⁴⁵ Augustine compares the necessity of food for survival with the necessity of intercourse for the survival of the human race. This is an important designation, since Augustine could easily have included eating for enjoyment, in which case the natural parallel would have been having sex for enjoyment. However, Augustine denies the value of the erotic dimension of the relationship between husband and wife, by only recognizing the importance of procreation. Thus marriage is for the sake of procreation, even though he encourages celibacy. This understanding will be influential in the formation of a Biblical theology of marriage.

⁴⁴ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 109

⁴⁵ Robert, Obach. *The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse: From St. Paul to Pope John Paul II*. Lanham: Lexington, 2009. 36

According to Augustine, the second good of marriage is fidelity. Augustine derives this good from 1 Corinthians 7:2-3, which states, “But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife her husband.”⁴⁶ Marriage acts as a form of sexual outlet for men, not because they can have sex with their wives, but because they can have adulterous sex. “Augustine derived that conclusion from his view that intercourse ‘for the purpose of satisfying concupiscence...is a venial sin’ while ‘adultery or fornication...is a mortal sin.’” To be clearer, a man partaking in lustful sex is more sinful than a man cheating on his wife. By virtue of having a wife, the husband can have adulterous sex with another woman and avoid the worse sin of lustful sex. Thus a wife not only helped to generate children and continue the human race, but it also provided a creative sexual loophole. Once again, Christian theology sees the woman as secondary to the man. The woman is a tool for the man.

Augustine believed that it was better to cheat on a spouse than it was to have lustful sex. Ironically, it would seem that a person participating in an affair would be participating in sexual pleasure as well. Regardless, Augustine’s statement suggested that the church so rigorously emphasized procreative sex and the avoidance of sexual pleasure, that a theologian would encourage infidelity over sexual pleasure.

Augustine’s third good of marriage was that Christian marriage was a sacrament, a holy oath or bond, which could not be broken once it was undertaken. It is important to note that in the fifth century, marriage was not at the same level of sacrament as baptism and the Eucharist. Instead, Augustine calls marriage a “sacrament,” because he viewed marriage as the sign of an unbreakable commitment. It was not an outward sign of an

⁴⁶ New International Version

inward grace, but it could be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between God and humanity. As these ideas diffused, the Church took on greater responsibility for marriage.

By the beginning of the 11th century, the Catholic church found itself in a position of power with regards to marriage, reinventing the notion of marriage from a secular relationship between families to a control of Christian sexuality. After a period of five hundred years of civil and religious jockeying, the Church became the keeper of marriage. Before the 11th century, there was no obligatory church ceremony for marriage, however this changed when, “bishops invoked the texts of Popes Evaristus and Calixtus in the false decretals to demand that all weddings be solemnly blessed by a priest.”⁴⁷ This push for a greater role of the church in marriage served not only to reinforce the Church’s new power over marriage, but more importantly, it allowed priests to monitor these relationships in the future. The church implemented a series of restrictions on marriage, “there originated in the Catholic Church an elaborate system of rules and laws in which all aspects of marriage were treated.”⁴⁸ These laws included prohibitions on sex before marriage, birth control within marriage, and sexual relations for pleasure. These laws suggest that marriage, at least the Augustine-influenced understandings of marriage, was an institution created in order to control the sexual acts of its congregants, no longer a function of familial agreement.

Sex Wars Part I: Catholics vs. Cathars

By marking marriage as the threshold between celibacy and sex and by making the church the threshold between singlehood and married life, the church maintained

⁴⁷ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 254

⁴⁸ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 254

power over Christian sexuality. In fact, some might argue that one of the distinct identities of the Church during the 11th -13th century was as a social chastity belt; what was distinctive about the Church was its power over sex. They formed part of their identity around this power. Thus, any change in the conception of marriage would change how the church formed its identity. Therefore, when Christian denominations, like the Cathers⁴⁹, challenged the Catholic Church on its teachings, the leadership of the church had to act in order to regain power.

Although the Catholic Church strictly enforced sexual laws, they were not strict enough for some Christian denominations of the time, like the Cathers, who challenged the Catholic Church on issues of sexuality. As a part of the Manichaeian Heresy, which lasted much of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, “The Cathers...calling themselves the ‘pure ones’...believed that ‘Every pleasure of the flesh was sinful.’”⁵⁰ They believed that sexual intercourse perpetuated the captivity and imprisonment of a soul in a corrupt human body. As a result of this rationalization, they believed that, “marriage [w]as a kind of systematic debauchery.”⁵¹ Additionally, the Albigensians of southern France attacked the Church for defense of sex through marriage. The Albigensians believed that all matter was evil and so marriage was sinful because it brought new material beings into the world. Although Catholics agreed that sex was sinful, an attack on marriage as a ‘systematic debauchery’ was an attack on one of the Church’s primary roles in society. In order to preserve their social standing, Christian

⁵⁰ Robert, Obach. *The Catholic Church on Marital Intercourse: From St. Paul to Pope John Paul II*. Lanham: Lexington, 2009. 77

⁵¹ Mackin, Theodore. *What is Marriage?* New York: Paulist Press, 1982. 177.

writers began to propose more strongly than before that intercourse for the sake of having children was positively good.

This marks a change in the role of marriage from a Catholic perspective, from a prison to a fort. Augustine proposed a negative connotation of marriage. As a result, there was a sense in which marriage confined the sin of sex, imprisoning it within its walls. Through many years of this imprisonment, sex became integral in the definition of marriage. If the Cathars and Albigensians got their way, there would be no sexual relations between Christians, resulting in no need for marriage. That is to say, without sex, marriage—and Catholic power—would be significantly changed. This imprisonment by the Church had two serious implications. First, it seriously stigmatized procreative sex and second it imposed a definition of marriage that relied on sex to continue.

Recognizing the importance of procreative sex for the institution of marriage and its importance on the propagation of Catholic Church's power, theologians resorted to defending sex from these radical Christians. Mark Jordan describes this shift, saying, "Marriage was constructed within Christianity as the only place left for sex. Marriage shelters some sexual activities from an otherwise absolute critique of sexual pleasure...they construct a protective boundary between moral sex and immoral sex, between married sex and everything else."⁵² Marriage no longer functioned as a way to keep sex in so much as it functions to "protect" and "shelter" sex. If sex was deemed completely irreverent, then marriage would lose its importance, leaving the Church with less power and a weaker identity. So, they protected sex within marriage, but still fought against any sexual pleasure.

⁵² Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 107

In its barricading of sex within marriage, the Catholic Church sacramentalized marriage, drawing from early Christian writers who identified a connection between a marriage and the human relationship with God. During the 11th century, church historians recovered St. Augustine's writings on the sacramental nature of marriage. As aforementioned, Augustine did not view marriage as a sacrament in the same way that baptism and the Eucharist were sacraments. Augustine's position resonated with that of Tertullian (d. 223) who was the first to speak of marriage as being sacramental-like, employing "the term sacrament in the sense of a figura, a symbol of the indissoluble bond between Christ and the Church."⁵³ Both Augustine and Tertullian use the term sacrament to mean a practice that physically reminds a person of his or her relationship with the divine, but does not actually impart God's grace.

Aquinas: Marriage as a Sacrament

It was difficult for the church to recognize marriage as a traditional sacrament—one that conveyed grace—until St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) admitted that it gave positive assistance towards holiness. Aquinas focused on the graces of spiritual unity and fidelity. First, the union allowed the two to experience a spiritual unity, "enabling [the husband] to love and care for [the wife] as Christ did the church, and enabling [the wife] to honor and obey [the husband] as the church did her Lord."⁵⁴ This spiritual unity provided both partners with a greater understanding of Christ's relationships with the Church. This sacramental understanding relied on a very skewed patriarchal understanding of marriage which stemmed in part from the early civil understanding of

⁵³ Selderhuis, H.J. "The Theory and Practice of Marriage on the Eve of the Reformation." *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 235

⁵⁴ Martos, Joseph. "From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage." *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 258

marriage as a partnership of families and a propagation of families through children. The Roman understanding of marriage had a significant impact on Aquinas. We should keep this in mind as we contemplate contemporaneous reconfigurations of marriage, since many opponents of gay marriage in Sweden condemned the church for responding to civil legislation.

Aquinas argued that marriage allowed the couple to “be faithful to one’s marriage vow, to resist temptation to adultery and desertion despite the hardships of married life.”⁵⁵ This provided the couple with the opportunity to experience grace in the form of fidelity. These two points helped Aquinas to conclude that marriage had sacramental natures similar to the natures of Eucharist and Baptism.

The sacramental nature of marriage relied on the cooperation of both partners. As Joseph Martos said, “The definition of the marriage sacrament implies that by making the right promise of fidelity, the one partner administers the sacrament of marriage to the other as a result of which an indissoluble relation originates.”⁵⁶ This suggests a changing of the guard with respect to marriage authority. First, the bride was incorporated into the decision, whereas previously only the father of the bride and the bridegroom arranged the marriage. This change encouraged a relationships between the husband and wife. While families may still have played significant roles in choosing spouses, the sacrament of marriage could only exist between a man and a woman relating to one another in the ways that God relates to humans. Thus, sacramental marriage relied on a personal relationship between the couple. In theory, this would improve upon the patriarchal,

⁵⁵ Martos, Joseph. “From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage.” *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 258

⁵⁶ Martos, Joseph. “From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage.” *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 236

hierarchical understanding of marriage. However, this message became convoluted. As we will see in subsequent chapters, our understanding of the relationship between God and man took on temporal form, rather than relational form, as theologians began to favor procreative sexual definitions of marriage.

Perhaps this convolution occurred as a result of the understanding marriage as a “natural” institution. In order to maintain the sacramental quality of marriage, it had to be preserved from the contaminations of a secular society. Since marriage was a natural institution that turned religious, the natural law took over control of the sacrament. In response to this understanding, Martos described, “as a natural institution marriage was ordered to the good of nature, the perpetuation of the human race, and was regulated by natural laws which resulted in the birth of children.”⁵⁷ Natural law was founded on the idea that everything was ordered to a specific end. That is to say, if the end was good, then those things that produced that good were also good. Aquinas reasoned that like food was necessary to preserve the health of an individual, sexual intercourse was necessary for the sake of procreation, because it helped to propagate the human race. Aquinas’ focus on the ends justifying the means takes away from an understanding of marriage as relational.

Although Aquinas makes a reasonable argument based on natural law, he begins down a slippery slope. His emphasis on “means” and “ends” starts Christians down a road away from the relationship of marriage, causing them to focus instead on the products of the relationship. If marriage and relationality helped Christians experience the relationship between God and humanity, then this understanding of marriage as

⁵⁷ Martos, Joseph. “From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage.” *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 258

procreative pulled them further from the truth. Ironically, it seemed that in its attempt to protect the sacrament of marriage, the church actually shifted the focus of marriage from spirituality to sexuality, seemingly forgoing its own intentions. The fixation on sexuality has taken the focus away from the supposed grace imparted by God on the relationship and its partners.

This new view of marriage, one which saw procreative sex as a natural and beneficial action, was not popular amongst all Catholics of the time, and entering the 13th century, many theologians saw marriage as a both positive and negative. They did not agree that marriage conferred grace in the same way as the other sacraments, namely because of the practice of intercourse. For most, marriage was a remedy for the sin of fornication rather than a means for receiving grace. Those with this viewpoint still clung to Augustine's idea that "original sin was transmitted from one generation to the next through the act of intercourse."⁵⁸ With this logic, even procreative sexual relations were seen as a mixed blessing. Ideally, Christians would abstain from sex all together, which would thus denigrate the value of marriage.

Marriage Wars Part II: Catholics vs. Protestants

Three hundred years later, these discordant views on marriage became one of the key issues during the Protestant Reformation. However, instead of the Catholic Church fighting against extremely strict Catholics, the Catholic Church found their newest opponents in the more relaxed Protestant denominations. Although Catholic theologians had transformed marriage into a sacrament, most leaders of the Protestant Reformation denounced the idea of marriage as a scripturally sanctioned sacrament. While the

⁵⁸ Martos, Joseph. "From Secular to Ecclesiastical Marriage." *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Readings in the Catholic Tradition*. Ed. Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor. New York: University of Notre Dame, 2002. 258

Catholic church maintained its strict understanding of marriage as a religious control over sex, key reformers, like Martin Luther, described marriage as “a secular and outward thing” and “a union of pious persons.” They promised, “a religion of wedded life and a politics of the control of marriage.”⁵⁹ The Catholic Church viewed the institution of marriage as a physical representation of God on Earth. Although Protestants disagreed about the sacramentality of marriage, the Protestant church still controlled the institution of marriage and it was still a practice for pious people. These differing perspectives highlighted the power struggle between the Catholics and Protestants. Marriage became one field on which the Protestant Reformation was fought. The dissolution of marriage as a sacrament became a symbol of the separation between Protestants and Catholics.

Interestingly, despite claims that marriage was not a sacrament, Protestant leaders continued to revere marriage. Their reverence was due in part by the tradition of religious weddings established by the Catholic Church and in other part by a more positive understanding of sex. In a radical shift in the understanding of sex, Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) described a “vigorously affirming, naturalistic attitude to the sexual functioning of the body.”⁶⁰ Regardless of this surprisingly positive view of sex, Luther did not hesitate to qualify his statement by describing sex as the result of lust. He concedes, “Better to confine your lust within marriage than to let it run wild in fornication or adultery or unnatural copulations.”⁶¹ Luther seemed to be reinstating the notion of marriage as a prison for sex, however, unlike Aquinas who held Augustine’s

⁵⁹ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 118

⁶⁰ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 118

⁶¹ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 119

negative view of sex, Luther looked upon sex as a natural occurrence, a neutral human characteristic.

Luther builds off of Aquinas' natural law argument, becoming one of the first theologians to introduce sex and love as being natural, God-bestowed *gifts*. This completely changed the way Lutherans conceived of marriage. Luther said, "God has created man and woman so that they should come together with pleasure and love, willingly and gladly with all their hearts."⁶² Luther condones the experience of pleasure and love, which seems to point towards sexual activity. This is the first time that the notion of love is mentioned when discussing marriage. Unlike earlier preoccupations with sex, Luther encourages love between the partners. According to Luther, there should be equilibrium between love and intimacy within marriage, all of which is condoned by God. Luther continues, saying, "And Bridal love or the will to marry is a natural thing, implanted and bestowed by God."⁶³ Luther acknowledges Aquinas argument that marriage is a natural institution, but pushes the argument further, suggesting that love—in addition to procreative sex—is a natural consequence of marriage. Whereas previous understandings of marriage relied solely on the sin of sex as the foundation and purpose for marriage, Luther inserts a new facet to the importance of marriage: love.

I would contend that Luther replaced Augustine's prison and Aquinas' fort with a sanctuary for sex and love amidst a hostile world. Feeling that the sex drive was as natural as seeing and feeling, Luther theorized a containment of sex within marriage, saying, "God has commanded the estate of matrimony, that everyone may have his

⁶² Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 118

⁶³ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 118

proper portion and be satisfied with it.”⁶⁴ The previously described description of marriage as a prison connoted marriage negatively, as a sin or a wrongdoing—like assault, murder or wearing white after Labor Day. Aquinas’ understanding of marriage only legitimized the sin, it did not negate the sin. But, for Luther’s, sex was seen as a natural occurring event within marriage. Marriage acted like a sanctuary, but the sex within marriage was accepted as a natural activity rather than a stigmatized sin. This more positive version of marriage as a sanctuary not only provided for a more positive understanding of marriage, but it opened the door for future changes regarding sex.

By Luther’s time, Christianity had established an understanding of marriage that relied heavily on procreative sex. At the core of Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther’s descriptions of marriage was sex. This emphasis on procreative sex within marriage would prove to be a problem for the church, as it continued to coexist with the state in later centuries. We have to wonder, what would happen when society liberated sex from marriage. Birth control and contraception provided ways for women to avoid the consequences sex outside of marriage. But how would these innovations and social changes affect the church’s understanding of marriage? Could the church still maintain its understanding of marriage in a rapidly changing world? Or would it have to relinquish the power forever?

⁶⁴ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 119

3

Challenging Church Doctrine: The Effects of Civil Legislation on Church Doctrine Formation

June 23, 2009. The sun was knife bright and blinding, cutting through my eyelids and into my dreams. I tried to convince myself I was not awake, throwing a pillow over my face and curling myself around and under my down comfortable, so big and thick I hoped to never be found. I tried to trap my dreams under the blanket, will them back into my head, but within a few seconds, I gave up my efforts. Rolling onto my side, I went to check my alarm clock.

“Shit!” I yelled, the sleep melting away around me in that instant.

The clock blinked “12:00 12:00 12:00” in panicked LED; the power must have gone out over night. I scrambled to find my cell phone to check the time. As I searched my pants from the night before, I could already feel my heart beating quickly. “9:15” I mumbled, already running around to gather my clothes. I had 20 minutes to get to the train station. I would have to sprint to the metro and get on the first train in order to make it to T-Centralen in time.

With barely enough time to think, I slid on some wrinkled khaki pants, a polo, and some loafers, before grabbing my book bag and slamming the door behind me. I sprinted across the cobblestone sidewalk, sailed down the escalator and slid into the metro just as the doors were closing. As I sat on the train, I looked at my phone: 9:23. Twelve minutes until my train departed. Looking down at the phone in my lap, I noticed my socks: one black and one white... perfect. I tried to pull my pants down as far as possible in order to hide my fashion faux pas. As the metro got closer and closer to T-Centralen, more and more people crowded into the train. I watched a few families pass by, mothers and daughters wearing crowns of flowers and vines on their heads, teenagers with deep tans, fathers pushing strollers. Everyone in the train station was eagerly anticipating the Midsommer festivities. I, on the other hand, was more concerned with what barriers I might literally have to hurdle in order to make my way out of the metro car. With a stop to go, I jostled my way into position, so that when the door opened at T-Centralen, I could run to my departure gate.

The sprint through T-Centralen was a blur, but as I jumped on the train, the cabin clock read 9:34. I was in the a first class cabin, and I knew my ticket was for coach, but the first class cabins were air-conditioned and I could already feel the beads of sweat

tracing the curve of my back and outlining my forehead. I sat down in one of the empty seats to catch my breath. A whistle blew a few seconds later, and the train began to creep slowly out of the station. Even in the air-conditioning, I could feel the warmth of the morning, as the sun radiated through the glass window. For a few minutes, the train's pace was slow. I focused on the magnificent views of the Swedish countryside. Lush green forests, accented occasionally by cottages and barns painted a falu red. However, as the train moved faster, my vision became a dream of kaleidoscope color. How much harder it was to see at quicker speeds, how much more difficult to focus on the details. Without the scenery to keep my attention, I began thinking about how this crazy morning was not particularly unusual for me. In fact, my entire research experience in Sweden had been accented by problems.

In one of my first interviews, I travelled to Uppsala, to meet with Holsten Fagerberg. His name might not mean much to the average American, but in Swedish circles, his name is synonymous with the beginning of homosexual inclusion in the Church. At the age of 96, his English was sometimes difficult to understand. This was where the problem began.

I remember it being a dreary Saturday, cold with the promise of rain. I had walked nearly three miles from the train station to get to his building: 40 Friedmansgatan. As I walked I kept track of the street numbers, 28, 30, 32. Nearing the number, I remembered thinking to myself, 34, 36, 38, and then the buildings ended and there was a giant field. *40 Friedmansgatan did not exist.* As my father's son, I would not call or ask for directions. Instead, I went down every side street and up to every apartment building, hoping to find his elusive building. With less than ten minutes before my scheduled

meeting with perhaps one of the most famous characters in this story, I found myself searching for a building that did not exist. Discouraged and with no other recourse, I resigned to calling Holsten. When he answered the phone, I clarified my problem. Again, he told me he lived at 40 Friedmansgatan. Frustrated, I explained to him that the building did not exist. “Well, I’m sitting in it right now,” he muttered in broken English. This back and forth happened a few times before I realized he had been saying “fourteen” not “forty” all along.

I rushed down the street and when I finally arrived at *fourteen* Friedmansgatan, an elderly man no taller than my shoulders greeted me, the weight of many years hunching his back. His lips were full and his glasses round. His eyes were the jewel blue of the archipelago I had seen on the cover of a tourist guide, and just as deep, endlessly complicated and intricate. He had spent much of his life as an ethicist at the University of Uppsala, and even in his old age, he still could be seen riding his bike to the National Cathedral for service every Sunday.

When I walked into his apartment, I noticed the framed artwork that covered the walls from floor to ceiling like wallpaper. We sat at the dining room table where a spread of sandwiches sat on a piece of fine china. He must have been preparing the food for hours before I got there. Each sandwich had a thick layer of butter and some pâté. Needless to say, they were deliciously fattening. He told me stories of the early church and its struggles with homosexuals. He reminisced about the Bishops asking him to write a book exploring homosexuality and Christian ethics.

At the time, he was in the minority opinion. Church officials did not recognize homosexuals in the Church, nor did the country recognize homosexuality as natural,

considering it an illness. Instead, he recognized that even today he stood in the minority. Thirty years ago, he was on the progressive end of the spectrum, fighting for the rights of homosexuals to enter into the church. While he still advocated for the rights of homosexuals in the church in 2009, he found himself on the side of the opposition with regards to the issue of marriage. He believed that marriage represented a union between a man and a woman, a relationship that homosexuals just couldn't emulate.

My flashback to Halston's interview was interrupted by a stocky woman asking the couple in front of me, "Biljett?". I quickly got out of my first class seat and moved towards the second-class cabin. I passed by the restaurant cabin, picked up a kanelbulle (cinnamon bun), before settling into my assigned seat. It wasn't long before I was thinking back to another frustrating interview, again with an ethicist. Normunds Kamergrauzis was the ethical advisor to Bishop Caroline Krook in Stockholm. He also happened to be a student and friend of Holsten Fagerberg. He invited me to discuss Church ethics regarding homosexual marriage at the Church's stift⁶⁵ in Stockholm. Learning from my mistakes with Holsten, I double-checked the address of the church building and arrived a few minutes early only to find the door code that Normunds had provided did not work. I sat outside, late on a Friday afternoon, buzzing the receptionist, who had apparently gone home early. A tornado started in the pit of my belly—one that whirled with all the frustration and anxiety of the past few weeks—nearly sucking my good sense right down through its center. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw some movers using a side entrance to deliver some office supplies. Acting as professional and

⁶⁵ Stift comes from German and refers to a large monastery that goes back to a charitable gift. However, in Sweden, Stifts refer to buildings that house Church offices.

ecclesiastical as possible, I snuck in behind them and hurried up to the fourth floor to meet Normunds.

He was tall, strong, and physically daunting—orthogonal to Holsten’s slight, weathered body and delicate, shaky hands. His hair was flyaway, dark, and full. Normunds and I discussed his book on Christian ethics. He told me how the Church must make decisions based on particular sources of Christian ethics. These sources included the Bible, Christian doctrine, moral reasoning, divine revelation, human reasoning, and empirical knowledge. Interestingly, he emphasized to me that Christian ethics did not necessarily require that Christians have a single view on each issue. It was reasonable for Christians to have a diversity of opinions on the issue of marriage. This had never occurred to me in all my years participating in the church.

As the train slowed down, I was once again pulled back into the present. I looked down at my watch. We must be getting into Karlstad a few minutes early I thought. *This would give me some time to sightsee before my interview*, I thought. However, when the train came to a complete stop on a small strip of land separating two large lakes, I knew something was not right. The intercom turned on, running through a symphony of static before a voice made an announcement in Swedish. This was the turning point of this trip, the moment around which everything else would gather—what I remembered was the silence in the cabin, and then whispers. I turned to the guy next to me to ask for a translation. He informed me that a person had jumped in front of the train and committed suicide. The crew was waiting for the police to come and investigate. We would be stuck on the train for several hours.

I immediately panicked and in my most selfish of thoughts, tried to figure out how I would contact the Bishop of Karlstad to let him know that I would be late. But as I recollected myself, I calmed down and started putting things in perspective. A man was dead and, while not the cause, I was riding the vehicle that killed him. I felt oddly responsible.

At about that moment, I heard a yell and as if things couldn't get worse, I watched as a glass of water fell from my neighbor's hand into my lap. Not a particularly auspicious beginning to a three-hour impromptu hiatus in a non-air-conditioned cabin car. I restrained my Vesuvian urge to erupt, and I accepted his apology.

He began some small talk about the weather, which I forecasted was just a tactic to get me to forget his clumsiness. If that was the case, then he was talented, because after a few minutes I was over the accident. He asked me what I was doing in Sweden, and I gave him the spiel about doing research on the Church of Sweden and its response to the recent gay marriage legislation.

"I *used* to go to church when I was younger," he said. "But I am a scientist now, and as I continued my studies, I found it hard to reconcile my classes with my faith."

"I feel similarly about my studies. I study both chemistry and religion in the States, and sometime it can be hard to believe in a God when so much in the world can be explained in other ways" I responded, "It can be hard even just identifying within the religious sphere as a scientist, or the science field as a religious person."

He agreed. "Recently, I've been wondering if it is really God that I object to, or just the sense of entitlement that seems to be a part of affiliating with a religious group." I must have given him a look of confusion, because he quickly added, "Like when they say

a person is a good Christian—why are Christians the most virtuous? For them, everything is so black and white...kind of like your socks.” He chuckled, as I looked down at my socks again, tugging at my pants to try to hide my mismatched fashion. “I guess I’ve always liked a splash of color.”

We continued talking until an intercom announcement said that the train would be making the final *1000-meter* journey to the Karlstad Station, where passengers could disembark the train. I had left for Karlstad early in the morning, but by the time I arrived it was already sunset, an amber sheen coating the town. “I guess this is goodbye,” I said to my new friend.

“Are you staying in Karlstad long?” he responded.

“I’m gonna see if the Bishop is still at the Stift, but if not, then I’m gonna grab some dinner before my train leaves at 8:30,” I said.

“So you are from Stockholm then?” He asked.

“Yeah,” I responded.

“Well, if you’re ever back in Karlstad, then we should get together for drinks,” he suggested, already getting out a piece of paper to write down his number. Was he asking me out? My heart began to beat faster, as if possibility had taken control of its metronome. *Axel. 014-555-4958*, it read.

But as soon as my thoughts began to wonder, a girl from across the train station waved. Axel waved back, grabbed his bags, ran over to her, and gave her a kiss. They waved goodbye and I reciprocated. Disappointed, I headed towards the exit and into the town. I followed the river from the train station to the main square of the town. As I walked down the street, I watched locals walking in the opposite direction. They looked

the way I wish I could: smooth, clear, and peaceful, a pond with a stone unthrown.

Instead, I was sweaty and out of breathe as I proceeded to the stift, the world pounding in my ears.

The Bishop's office was on the fourth floor. I pressed the elevator button, but when it didn't open immediately, I took the spiral staircase up four floors. Dizzy from my ascension, I took a moment to catch my breath before entering the Church office. I ran into a man who told me the Bishop had not left yet. He paged him. When he came out of his office, he greeted me and wondered what happened. I explained how the man had jumped in front of the train, leaving us stranded only about 1000 meters from the Karlstad station. He nodded, as if not particularly surprised, before graciously inviting me into his office to talk for a few minutes before he had to leave for the evening. He spent nearly an hour and a half with me before the night was over.

When I finally got home that night , it was after midnight. I was exhausted. The television hummed with a grainy picture of Swedish news, the volume muted, and my roommate passed out on the couch. I dropped my bag on the floor, pulled off my loafers, the sweaty polo, and my wrinkled khaki pants, closed the window shades and turned off the light. In the darkness, the only light came from my alarm clock, still flashing deep red, 12:00 12:00 12:00. As I went to change the time, I began to think back on the day and my interview with the Bishop, an interview that highlighted the most important historical events during the debates on sexuality, marriage and partnership.

The Church of Sweden had long been on the forefront of controversial issues, finding places within their walls for marginalized groups. Since the early 20th century, in many respects they have mastered the art of doctrinal transformation. Issues like

contraception (1940s), ordination of women (1950s) and the blessing of homosexual partnerships (2005) showed the Church's ability to accommodate changes in social thought, albeit at a tortoise's pace. The Church established a tempo and a method for determining the theological correctness of a subject, which involved years of pondering the issue and consulting with other religious bodies; a tempo with which they felt comfortable. However, Riksdag's (the Swedish Government) rapid passage of the gender-neutral marriage law forced the Church of Sweden into the uncomfortable position of making rapid changes to their theology or risking the loss of their right to marriage completely. This chapter will juxtapose the slow, consultative process of the Swedish Church on the issues of contraception and gender-neutral civil partnerships with their rapid decision making regarding the issue of gay marriage, in an effort to understand better the disconcertion of many people regarding the church's swift decision on gay marriage.

Contraception: Thirty Years of Reluctance

As a church-state, the relationship between religious and secular marriage was blurry at best during the early 20th century. The Lutheran doctrine developed a sexual compact that located sex within marriage and controlled the acceptable forms of marriage. Laws that prohibited abortion and contraception agreed with the Church's understanding of sex, which was only acceptable within marriage. If sex was only allowed in marriage, then children were only acceptable within marriage as well. This logic rejected the idea that sex could be for pleasure alone. Offspring conceived outside of wedlock were looked down upon. This logic remained true as long as contraception was illegal in Sweden.

In the early twentieth century, the “Sexual Revolution” in Sweden meant a deconstruction of the Swedish Christian sexual compact, reigniting the conflict between church and state. Whereas the church previously controlled sexuality through marriage, the rise of discussions about birth control in Sweden caused a shift in the control of sex. During the roaring twenties, Elise Ottesen-Jensen, known as Ottar, travelled around Sweden giving illegal talks about sex and sexuality, since there was a ban on providing information about contraception and abortion. Ottar believed that the providing information to the masses was the only way to change the laws. She continued this work until 1933, when she and a group of radical health-care workers started an organization to distribute information on contraception in Sweden (RFSU). A year later, RFSU established the first sexual and reproductive health clinic, providing services and counseling to youth as well as adults. By 1938, the ban on the provision of information about contraception was overturned. Ottar’s hypothesis was correct. The dissemination of information through the RFSU and the reproductive health clinic led to significant changes in sexual activity in Sweden.⁶⁶ These social changes led to discussions within the church regarding how their understanding of sex and marriage might change as a result, but these were just discussions without significant action associated with them.

Following these changes in the sexual environment in Sweden, leaders of the Lutheran Church of Sweden had to make an official position on the issues. In 1951, Sweden’s thirteen bishops formulated *Ett brev i en folkets livsfråga* (*A letter about a way of life*), which expressed the Church’s position on contraception, and other issues of sexuality, including marriage, divorce, and non-traditional living arrangements. With new

⁶⁶ "Our History - About RFSU - RFSU." *RFSU - Riksförbundet För Sexuell Upplysning*. Web. 21 Nov. 2009. <<http://www.rfsu.se/en/Engelska/About-rfsu/Our-History/>>.

challengers to the Church's position on sex, the church leaders reiterated their positions on sex in an effort to maintain some semblance of control amidst a society seemingly spiraling into sexual chaos. Regarding extramarital sex, "the state church considers all sexual relations prior to, or outside of, marriage a sin against God and one's fellow man."⁶⁷ The Church of Sweden reiterated Aquinas' natural law understanding of marriage, stating, "Every marriage in which husband and wife...do not desire to have children is misdirected."⁶⁸ This statement suggests that the only viable marital relationships were the ones that produced offspring. Since the church of Sweden still maintained control over marriage and they enforced a policy that contained sex within marriage, the church still indirectly reinforced its dominion over sex. Pleasure itself remained suspect, if not sinful, in the eyes of the church. They knew that if sex became popular outside of marriage, then their institution of marriage would lose its purpose and they would lose their authority. The church's first action against these new views of sexual liberation was to reinforce its old views, in hopes of maintaining its original doctrine. Theological transformation began very slowly for the Church of Sweden.

Concurrently, the church was losing its monopolization on marriage. The Freedom of Religion Act of 1951 gave other faith communities the right to apply for authorization to conduct marriages. By enabling other denominations to conduct marriage, the State suggested that the state church no longer held supreme authority over the ceremony. Whereas prior to the law, the Church monopolized the construction of the Swedish understanding of Marriage, after the law, other religions could contribute. If the

⁶⁷ Linner, Birgitta, and Richard J. Litell. *Sex and Society in Sweden*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967.
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⁶⁸ Linner, Birgitta, and Richard J. Litell. *Sex and Society in Sweden*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967.
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church's power over marriage was a scarf, then this law was the first pull that would lead to its eventual unraveling. This law would promote a more diverse conversation about marriage, requiring the church to begin discussing the theology of marriage more creatively. The process continued to be slow, and the Church's majority power and connection to the state made it difficult for anyone to challenge their understandings.

Not only did the church lose some power over marriage due to civil legislation, but also it began losing control over sex as well. After the lifting of the ban on the provision of information on contraception in 1952, the church slowly started losing their power over sex. Prior to the Swedish sexual revolution, marriage was a means for the Church to control sexual behaviors, a means that evolved for the purpose of controlling sex. Some would argue that marriage relied on sex for stability and foundation, just as much as sex relied on marriage for "protection" against conservative, abstinent Christians. As a result, when the state began taking over control of sex from the church, marriage began losing its footing.

Without the power to control sex, the Lutheran church had to consider positions on contraception that were more lenient. Karl Gustaf Boethius expressed the need for a new realignment of the church's stance on sex and marriage in order for the church to remain relevant in contemporary society, saying, "The only possibility the church has of getting on speaking terms with young people is in saying *no* to what so many do" (emphasis mine).⁶⁹ This call for change in the Church's position on contraception reflected the change in sexual power dynamics within Sweden, where the state had

⁶⁹ ⁶⁹ Linner, Birgitta, and Richard J. Litell. *Sex and Society in Sweden*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967. 73

jurisdiction over sexual matters now. This call shows how public and social understandings affected the church's positions on social issues.

Although, the church slowly accommodated to shifting social views, it never acknowledged such claims. In fact, the church “tried to carry on as they had for centuries, prescribing sexual conduct and threatening punishments for deviations. But the old speeches didn't seem to resonate as they had before.”⁷⁰ Despite a changing of the guards with regards to sexuality in Sweden, the remnants of old sexual paradigms still existed, especially within the church. A 1964 meeting of the 13 Bishops of Sweden evidenced this, when rather than adopt a more lenient and realistic position on sexuality, the Bishops adhered to their 1951 statement mentioned earlier.⁷¹ Unfortunately, unlike the blind acceptance of Christian teachings that existed in earlier centuries, “Christian moral theology [could] no longer win acceptance just because it [was] the legislative speech of Christendom. It [had to] persuade on other grounds its own voice.”⁷² This led Karl Gustaf Boethius to call for “‘aligning the church more closely with reality.’ [He] said that premarital intercourse should not be condemned as long as the couple involved sincerely plan to be married.”⁷³ Although this did not reflect the historical position of the church, the church could no longer rehearse and reinvent the scripts of the past, because society now challenged those scripts. In order to maintain any semblance of power over marriage and sexuality, they needed to adapt to the changing perspectives of the times. Although

⁷⁰ Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 134.

⁷¹ Linner, Birgitta, and Richard J. Litell. *Sex and Society in Sweden*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967. 69

⁷² Jordan, Mark D. *The Ethics of Sex (New Dimensions to Religious Ethics)*. Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2002. 134

⁷³ Linner, Birgitta, and Richard J. Litell. *Sex and Society in Sweden*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967. 73

the church eventually caved under the intense social pressures coming from the government and the Swedish people, this process of doctrinal transformation took nearly 30 years.

Afterwards, debate ensued regarding the Church's authority on social issues. Society became skeptical of the Church's sexual constructions, and that skepticism meant that the Church's statements on issues like homosexuality and marriage were challenged. This change gave voices to many traditionally marginalized people, because they no longer blindly accepted the Church's statements. Almost immediately after the issue of contraception, gay and lesbian voices began to be heard advocating for their acceptance within the Church.

Homosexuality: A 20-year Struggle for Acceptance

Halston Fagerberg became the first voice for the queer community, after the Bishop's Conference tasked him with writing a book on the ethics of homosexuals in the Church. This was an important step for the Church, since only 20 years earlier (1951), the same Bishop's Conference published the aforementioned pastoral letter, *Ett brev i en folkets livsfråga (A letter about a way of life)*, "using biblical arguments to condemn homosexual acts as contrary to God's will, interpreting them therefore as an expression of psychic illness."⁷⁴ In 1974, *De homosexuella och kyrkan (Homosexuals and the Church)* was published and distributed throughout the Swedish dioceses.

The ethicists determined that "genuine" homosexuality did not oppose Christian teachings. "Genuine" homosexuality existed when the sexual orientation was not self-imposed but arose out of an individual's nature. They reasoned, "from a psychological

⁷⁴ Kamegrauzis, Normunds. "Passion, Fairness and Fascination: Swedish Perspectives on Debating Homosexuality." *Crucible* Dec. 2003. Print. pp.2

standpoint, it is important that homosexuals are able to form lasting and stable relationships."⁷⁵ The book found overriding reasons why the church should support and affirm lasting homosexual relationships built on love and a will to lasting fidelity, concluding that "homosexual partnerships between two persons of the same sex built on mutual love and commitment to fidelity should be recognized as ethically well grounded."⁷⁶ These recommendations were groundbreaking for three reasons. First, they opened the door of conversation for the Church regarding the issue of same-sex relations. Second, they suggested that there was no obstacle between a homosexual individual and leadership positions in the Church. Third, the authors' conclusion did not rule out the possibility for some form of blessing ceremony in the future.

Although two of the most revered ethicists in Uppsala made a cogent, compelling argument for the acceptance of "genuine" homosexuals, which disseminated through the entire country, there was no immediate action by the Church. The Church's discussion on the issue was characterized by a wide diversity of opinion, rendering it unlikely that the community would reach an agreement. This marked the beginning of the church's consultative period, in which they examined different arguments.

With the ideas of Fagerberg percolating in their minds, the church took note of society's changing understanding of homosexuals, in an effort to better understand homosexuality. In 1979, the National Board of Health and Welfare removed homosexuality from its list of diseases,⁷⁷ meaning that society no longer looked down upon them as sick people. This societal decision resonated with the earlier writings of

⁷⁵ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 3.

⁷⁶ Kamergrauzis, Normunds. "Passion, Fairness and Fascination: Swedish Perspectives on Debating Homosexuality." *Crucible* Dec. 2003. Print. pp. 3

⁷⁷ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 15

Fagerberg; the two together helped to change the church's attitude towards homosexuals. The strong minority opinion that favored welcoming gay people into the church grew steadily over the next few years, until a majority of people accepted gay people into the church. After nearly 20 years of discussion, the church finally found a space for homosexuals.

Gay Partnership Blessings: Another 20-year discussion

In the same way that Holsten Fagerberg's 1974-book catalyzed discussions about homosexuals in the church, the 1994-book *Kyrkan och homosexualiteten (The Church and Homosexuality)* provided the starting place for a discussion about gay partnership. The text presented the two different approaches to gay marriage within the Church. Bishop emeritus Bertil Gärtner looked critically upon homosexuals and marriage, suggesting, "Marriage, as a Divine order of creation, regards the natural intercourse between a man and woman in a positive framework, so sexual relations between persons of the same sex are prohibited."⁷⁸ In contrast, Dr. Gert Nilsson expressed a positive understanding of homosexuals and marriage within the church, positing, "sex is regarded primarily as an expression of love, mutuality, and companionship, and only secondarily as a means of procreation."⁷⁹ Nilsson rejected much of the ancient church's arguments about sex and marriage outlined in Chapter 2, concluding that the Church should accept homosexual relationships as an alternative form of living together as long as the homosexuality is "genuine." Still, the book argued that gay cohabitation and registered partnerships were

⁷⁸ Kamergrauzis, Normunds. "Passion, Fairness and Fascination: Swedish Perspectives on Debating Homosexuality." *Crucible* Dec. 2003. Print.

⁷⁹ Kamergrauzis, Normunds. "Passion, Fairness and Fascination: Swedish Perspectives on Debating Homosexuality." *Crucible* Dec. 2003. Print.

conventions different from marriage.⁸⁰ As an institution set apart from marriage, the church could envision a blessing service, because the unions did not impinge upon the church's theology on marriage. Lest we be fooled, this position was in no way representative of the majority of Swedes in the church.

Although the church did not have majority support in its efforts to institutionalize a blessing for civil partnerships, the state found a majority in favor of partnerships, resulting in the passage of the *Registered Partnership for Homosexuals Act* of 1995. This act put a great deal of pressure on the Church of Sweden to welcome homosexuals into the Church by allowing them to participate in partnership blessings. Early in 1995, the Bishops' Conference issued *Pastoral rådet angående förbön för dem som ingått partnerskap (Pastoral Advice on Prayer for Those Who Have Entered Into Partnership)*.⁸¹ This document loosely outlined a process for *blessing* same-sex partnerships, but did not see the process as a *rite* of the Church. The distinction between a blessing and a rite was that a blessing was a form of pastoral care for the couple, whereas a rite was an ecclesiastical tradition regarding particular church practices and how those practices might best be received in Sweden. Since *Homosexuality and the Church* and other documents had given homosexuals a place within the church, it did not seem unheard of to bless them like all parishioners. Whereas partnership blessings did not necessarily conflict with their teachings, marriage meant changing a doctrine very engrained in their theological tradition. This distinction made it easier for the Church to accept partnerships, but meant nothing for their understanding of marriage. The first step

⁸⁰ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 39

⁸¹ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 3

in the acceptance of civil partnerships was establishing a fundamental difference between marriage and partnership; this was an important distinction.

While a private blessing with the couple initially appeased, in 1997 a motion was brought before the General Synod that expressed the need for a public ceremony of blessing for homosexuals in the church. By 1999, the Bishop's Conference amended the original prayer service by making it more public and allowing loved ones to attend. Unlike the intimate, secluded blessing that was seen primarily as a form of pastoral care, this new blessing would take on more significance. In ten years, the church had a loose outline of a blessing ceremony for homosexual couples, but still very little change in their doctrine. As comfortable as the church was with its virtual control over marriage, due to the civil relationship between the Church and the State, the leaders did not need to rush into an official decision about blessing partnerships.

The church and state existed together, making decisions that mutually benefited the two. Then, in 2000 the Church-state relationship changed dramatically, as the civil and spiritual spheres no longer intertwined. This had serious implications on religion in Sweden. For many years the Church of Sweden held almost complete control over the wedding ceremony, but, following the 2000 decision, they had much less. Despite this change, the Church of Sweden still maintained a privileged position in relation to other faith communities through the fact that all priests in the Church of Sweden were authorized wedding officiates under the Marriage Code. Contrastingly, other religious communities and their individual leaders had to apply for the right to marry.

Just as a shift in the control of sex and contraception required the church to make changes to its doctrine, the transition of marriage from a more church controlled

institution to a more state-controlled institution had serious implications on the evolution of marriage. With even less control over marriage than before, the Church found itself even more at the mercy of the state and other religious denominations. It needed to continue consulting groups about homosexual partnerships, because homosexual unions continued to be an important social issue, one that could no longer be ignored.

In light of their new perspectives coming into the picture, in 2002, the Theology Committee, chaired by Professor Göran Bexell, presented to the synod, *Homosexuella i kyrkan (Homosexuals in the Church)*, an exploration of the issue of gay cohabitation and registered partnership. The book approached the issue of homosexuals in the church from a more pluralistic perspective, avoiding the two-position approach adopted in *Homosexuals and the Church*. This helped them to envision what tolerance might look like in the Church and society, and in what ways it might be implemented. The book had two primary arguments: (1) discrimination against gay and lesbian people in the church was prohibited and (2) sexual orientations cannot be a reason for denying ordination to gay and lesbian candidates to the priesthood.⁸² These conclusions suggested that the standards of valuation should be applied to all people in the church, regardless of sexual orientation. As a result of the success of the book, the Central Board decided to make the task “broader and more in-depth by bringing into the context the theology of marriage, the ‘sacramentality’ of love, changes in forms of cohabitation, and the legislation.”⁸³

The significance of this text was two fold. First, the book’s title (*Homosexuals in the Church*) was the first time the church publically pronounced its inclusion of gay

⁸² Kamergrauzis, Normunds. "Passion, Fairness and Fascination: Swedish Perspectives on Debating Homosexuality." *Crucible* Dec. 2003. Print.

⁸³ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 3

people *in* the church. Previous titles like *Homosexuals and the Church*; *The Church and Homosexuality*, recognized the interaction between the two groups, but only in 2002 did the church fully embrace homosexual members into their body. Second, the church was able to continue its long chrysalis towards homosexual partnership blessing without challenging its understanding of marriage. The text still reminded the parishioners that, “The church makes a distinction between marriage and registered partnerships,”⁸⁴ an argument already presented by Gert Nilsson in *The Church and Homosexuality*. The text recognized a partnership as a valid solution to the marriage conundrum, giving gay people a ceremony of blessing without harming the Christian understanding of marriage. In reality, it created a hierarchy for the forms of union. Marriage was at the top, reserved only for heterosexual couples, while partnerships served as a second tier option. Once again, the church slowly crept through its consultation period, refining its understanding of the issue.

This hierarchy was underscored a year later when the Church rejected a motion to design a church wedding ceremony that could be used for both heterosexual and same-sex couples. Despite rejecting the full marital ceremony, the Church did task the Central Board of the Church to draft a church ceremony for entering into partnership that would have full legal force.

Before developing the new ceremony, the Theology committee held a public hearing on love, cohabitation, and marriage, which promoted dialogue between researchers, theologians, scientists, scholars, representatives of social institutions, and various churches and faiths. The results of this conference were published in *Kärlek, samlevnad och äktenskap (Love, Cohabitation, and Marriage)*. Following the conference,

⁸⁴ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp.39

the theological committee got to work drafting a ceremony for partnerships, which they presented in their synod communication, *Kyrklig akt för partnerskap och därmed tillhörande frågor* (*Church ceremony for partnership and associated issues*). During the synod, each diocese split up and discussed the document.⁸⁵ Although these discussions did not result in the passage of a partnership blessing ceremony, they did become the foundation on which subsequent discussions about the subject would be built. This was the first public event regarding the issue. It gave the Church an understanding of what a diverse section of the church believed about partnership.⁸⁶

Following through with these directives, the Church sought out the opinions of peer denominations, hoping to receive differing, dissonant opinions about the issue. To jumpstart their work, the theological committee participated in a second conference focusing on love, cohabitation, and marriage,⁸⁷ inviting experts like lecturer Johanna Gustaffsson Lundberg from Högskolan Dalarna, and senior lecturer Mikael Lindfelt from Åbo Akademi. Whereas the first conference dealt with the opinions and findings of Swedish citizens, the second conference included a number of university theologians from across the Nordic region who had been working on cohabitation issues. After discussing the issue with outside groups, their own theologians, and secular leaders, the Theological committee felt it finally had enough information in order to assume a position on the issue.

⁸⁵ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 3

⁸⁶ The Church continued its work on the issue of partnerships by seeking outside opinions. In March of 2005, the Theological committee released *Teologiska kommitténs fortsatta arbete med samlevnadsfrågor* (*The continued work of the Theological Committee on cohabitation issues*), which suggested that more rigorous theological reflection was necessary and that the church should experiment with a ceremony for blessing partnerships in church. Soon after, the Central Board approved directives for continued work on blessings for partnerships based on the theological committee's directives.

⁸⁷ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 23

After nearly two decades of conversation, a myriad of books published, and several conventions to discuss the issue, the theological committee could confidently write *Samlevnadsfrågor (Cohabitation Issues)*, a document presented to the Church Synod that suggested the creation of a service of blessing for partnerships. It demanded that the church work actively to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, and reminded the church that a life in partnership did not constitute grounds for refusing ordination. The Church Synod convened in 2005 to decide on the future of homosexual unions. They voted to support the Theological committee's recommendations, basing their verdict on the presumption that marriage should be reserved for a man and a woman, but that registered partnership gave homosexual couples an equivalent form of cohabitation.

For some, this result was insulting and a form of discrimination. To them, the then Archbishop, K.G. Hammar referred back to an argument from *Homosexuals in the Church*. He explained that both homosexuals and heterosexuals can be reflections of God's love, however "the church is not served by using the word marriage, with its thousands of years of linguistic gravity, with respect to homosexual relationships, even if society would like to do so. Relationships can be equivalent even if they go by different names."⁸⁸

After adopting the order for civil partnerships in December 2006, the church finally seemed to figure out the balance they hoped for, the solution they needed, using the same logic established in the *Church and Homosexuals* by Gert Nilsson. They reasoned that a partnership was fundamentally the same as a marriage, but with a different name, so they could still promote consensual loving homosexual relationships,

⁸⁸ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 39

without jeopardizing their own theology. It cannot be stressed enough the time needed for the church to make a discussion on the issue of same-sex partnerships: thirty years to overcome initial sexual qualms, twenty years to fully welcome homosexuals into the church and another twenty years to fully accept gay partnerships into their doctrine. Every indication suggested that the process for deciding on gay marriage would take at least twenty years. The Church was set for a few years at least, or so they thought.

Gay Marriage: Swift doctrinal decisions in the Church of Sweden

Yet, only months after the church's landmark decision to adopt a blessing for same-sex partnerships, the government drafted *Åktenskap för par med samma kön-Vigelfrågor (Marriage for same-sex couples-Wedding Issues)*, an attempt by the government to poll the national institutions about their thoughts on legalizing gay marriage. The government circulated the document in order to receive feedback on the proposal. They hoped to understand whether the pulse of Sweden beat for gender-neutral marriage. Leading the inquiry was former Swedish Attorney General, General Hans Regner.⁸⁹ The government proposed a merger of Sweden's *Marriage Code* and *Partnerships Act* into a single marriage act with the same legal benefits. Furthermore, they proposed also referring to same sex relationships as marriages. The state's change pressured and prompted new discussions of the issue in the church, this time regarding marriage rather than partnership.

Within the church of Sweden, each diocese held meetings, along with the Parish Association and the Church of Sweden Youth, in order to discuss the issue.⁹⁰ After

⁸⁹ "Inquiry gives green light to gay marriage - The Local." *The Local - Sweden's news in English*. 21 May 2007. Web. 26 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.thelocal.se/6757/20070321/>>.

⁹⁰ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp.3

deliberations, the Church responded to the government's call by maintaining the position upheld since Holsten Fagerberg's report in 1974. According to them, the word "Äktenskap" (Marriage) should only be used to describe a relationship between a man and a woman.⁹¹ This resonated with the Church's reasoning for accepting the blessing of gay civil partnerships. This was not surprising given the small amount of time the church had to deliberate the issue, since they were used to long periods of consultation and had only a few months to prepare.

The majority of the church was happy to accept gay people in marriage-like institutions, but marriage itself must be reserved for heterosexuals.⁹² It is interesting to see how the Church clung to its tradition when the state did not enforce a political decision on them. Perhaps the church even believed that they still had the same power over the state that they once did before the split in 2000. If that was the case, then they received a startling wakeup call in November of 2008, when the Swedish government put forward a bill on *Marriage Issues*, which would extend marriage to cover same-sex couples as of 1 May 2009. Their disregard for the Church's opinion underscores the clear distinction between the Church and State. The State's decision to go ahead with the gay marriage legislation required that the church reverse its negative position on homosexual marriage or risk losing their right to marry.

Perhaps to the reader, this language might sound inflated or hyperbolic, but a clearer understanding of the Swedish marriage system might provide a better understanding of why the church risked losing marriage. In Sweden, a couple had two

⁹¹ "Church of Sweden approves gay marriage law - The Local." *The Local - Sweden's news in English*. 12 Dec. 2007. Web. 25 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.thelocal.se/9387/20071212/>>.

⁹² It should be noted that a strong minority would have preferred that the Central Board accept a broadening of the term marriage

options when getting married: have a civil marriage or a religious marriage. Both held equal weight legally. When the law differentiated between marriage and civil partnership, the church could still officiate marriages without accepting partnerships, since partnerships were fundamentally different unions than marriages. They had no real pressure to change their ways, because they would not lose the right to marry if they did not bless gay partnerships. However, if the government changed the definition of marriage, then the church would be responsible for abiding by the law, since a church marriage held real legal weight. Allowing only heterosexual marriage within the church would be discrimination and therefore illegal. The Church needed to decide to either accept or reject gay marriage.

Presuming that a new law would take effect because of the *Marriage Issues Bill*, the Central Board drafted a consultative response, meaning the board would look into the possible solutions to this new problem. The document included a proposal for an order of marriage that could be used for same-sex couples, along with additional, consequential changes to the Church order.⁹³ The purpose of these documents was not to inform the parishioners of what *would* happen, but rather to provide members of the Church with options for what *could* happen. They emphasized that the theological dialogues necessary for making a decision regarding an order of service for marrying same-sex couples had not been completed and that the Central Board had not decided on the issue. They hoped that the dioceses would discuss the topic and respond back to the Central Board. The church was trying to revert back to its careful transformation method in order to make a theologically responsible and representative decision about marriage, which is reasonable

⁹³ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 39

since only a year earlier the official language of the church was that they had not had enough theological reflection to justify the change.

With both strongly positive and negative responses, the church might have originally tasked ethicists and theologians to write several books about the subject as they did before. Instead, the Church moved forward with its draft of a proposed liturgy for marriage. Interestingly, the proposed order conveniently failed to use the word marriage *once*. On 10 January 2009, the host of the Saturday morning radio program, “Ekot” interrogated the Archbishop, Anders Wejryd, about why the word “marriage” was mysteriously absent from the proposed order of worship that the Church planned to adopt the following Monday. This omission suggested a continued resistance towards the idea. The Church Board had not had enough time to think through the issue, so they tried to remain as close to their tradition as possible. Thus, they separated homosexual relationships from marriage.

The church seemed to respond to the radio interview during a meeting between the Church officials on 12 January 2009 by inserting the word “marriage” into the service. Although this change might seem perfunctory, the addition was a turning point, having unfathomable consequences on the history of marriage in Sweden. In the past, the Church Board and its predecessors had consistently asserted that the word marriage should be used to describe the relationship between one woman and one man. By adopting the new draft of the order, the Board proclaimed that it was possible to institute a gender-neutral understanding of marriage within the Church of Sweden.⁹⁴ The swiftness

⁹⁴ It is important to note that this decision does not represent the official decision of the church on the issue. The marriage order agreed on was the *proposed* marriage order that would be presented to the Church Synod in October 2009. The synod ultimately decided on the issue of gender-neutral marriage, not the Church Board.

of this addition to the order put many people on edge. This over-the-weekend change led many to challenge the decision of the Church, calling the change unfounded. Many believed the decision happened too quickly and without the usual reflection period.

The addition of the word “marriage” into the order, in all its swiftness, might be seen as a microcosm for the entire gay marriage issue in the Church of Sweden. The committee had drafted a ceremony that they felt comfortable with, but one which did not coningle marriage and homosexual relationships. This marriage ceremony might represent the Church’s theology on marriage. When confronted by society, in this case the radio show host, the Church, led by Anders Wejryd, could not adequately defend its position. The theological committee quickly amended the text, in the same way that the Church of Sweden uncharacteristically transformed its theology on marriage in such a short time.

Throughout the winter and spring of 2009, the Riksdag discussed the issue of gender-neutral marriage, splitting along religious lines. Since 2007 when Chancellor of Justice Hans Regner proposed that marriage be extended to same-sex couples, the government had conferred about the decision. By 2009, six of the seven parties within the Riksdag approved of the new gender-neutral marriage proposition (Social Democrats, Moderate, Centre, Liberal People’s Party, Left, and Green Party). The only conflicting opinion came from the Kristdemokraterna (Christian Democrats), who opposed same-sex marriage.⁹⁵ This party, which was founded in response to the Swedish government’s decision to remove religious education from the elementary school syllabus, has long been tied to “Sweden’s tiny Baptist revival movement,” especially in the Free

⁹⁵ "Sweden sets date for gay church weddings - The Local." *The Local - Sweden's news in English*. 6 Nov. 2008. Web. 26 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.thelocal.se/15504/20081106/>>.

Churches.⁹⁶ Despite having since toned down their religious rhetoric and broadened their political message, they still maintained a conservative, religious understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman. Even with this dissenting opinion, on 1 April 2009, the Swedish Parliament passed the new gender-neutral marriage law.⁹⁷ A month later, Sweden celebrated its first civil, gay marriage ceremony, but homosexual partners would have to wait several more months before the Synod would decide on the gay marriage subject in the Church of Sweden.

The legalization of gender-neutral marriage in Sweden put the Church of Sweden in a difficult predicament. Although they had prepared for this situation earlier in the year by drafting and adopting a proposed order for marriage, many within the church clung to their traditional understandings of marriage, which existed only between a man and a woman. They resisted calls to reform and claimed that the process for transformation had occurred too fast. They had only just recently adopted a ceremony for gay partnerships. There were many who dismissed these allegations of not having done enough work theologically, arguing that the most difficult barrier towards gay marriage was accepting civil partnerships. Switching to marriage was just a small issue in comparison. Whatever opinions people held, the law left very few options for the church. In order to perform marriages, they had to abide by the law; otherwise they would have to forfeit their right/rite.

Although the Church Board had agreed upon a service of marriage, the Church did not have to accept the state's decision on gay marriage. In a statement in May 2009,

⁹⁶ Burke, Al. "Swedish political parties; 1998 election." *Al Burke*. Sept. 1998. Web. 26 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.nnn.se/archive/val-98/parties.htm>>.

⁹⁷ "Sweden passes new gay marriage law - The Local." *The Local - Sweden's news in English*. 2 Apr. 2009. Web. 26 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.thelocal.se/18608/20090402/>>.

the Theological Committee outlined the three possible options for serving same-sex couples who approach the church about marriage: “(1) Provide a choice between a wedding service or a blessing of a civil marriage. (2) Only offer blessing of civil marriages (which can then be given a different name in the blessing ceremony). (3) Decline to offer blessing of civil marriages due to the concept of marriage in the legislation not concurring with the Church’s view of marriage.”⁹⁸ These three options were proposed to the Synod in October, where the attendees would decide which to choose.

At the synod, the choices took on many faces, as the participants each took an opportunity to express his or her variation on the options. Many were in favor of the first option, which would allow homosexuals the same right to marry as straight people. Others, including the Archbishop were in favor of the second option, where the Church would forfeit all ability to perform legally binding weddings, and instead, perform blessings of civil marriages instead. This meant that the juridical procedure would become purely the state’s affair. This option was appealing because many perceived that the broadening concept of marriage no longer resonated with the church’s view of marriage, but the Church still wished to be able to bless the couple’s relationship. The solution would maintain the Church’s distinction of marriage and partnership and provide time to pursue its reflection on its theological, ethical and strategic objectives. Conservative Christians generally took up the final option, believing that the Church could not bless same-sex couples.

⁹⁸ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. pp. 13

Of those who did not support the Church accepting same sex marriage, the largest complaint was the Church's lack of theological foundation. For these people, strict readings of the Bible and long traditions of understanding marriage held true. They watched as the church made calculated, reluctant decisions regarding contraception, homosexuality and blessings for civil partnerships. The swift decision about gay marriage worried them. However, for many others, recent theological work on this issue led to new insights and altered their understandings. While discussion and analysis of the Church in Chapter 2 suggested that marriage was used traditionally to contain and restrain sex, our historical journey through the Swedish construction of marriage in Chapter 1 suggested that marriage was just as traditionally viewed as the mutual, life-long relationship that constitutes a society's foundation. For the Church of Sweden to express a desire to support such relationships even for same-sex couples meant the church saw theological possibilities for including these couples in the concept of marriage.

4

Finding Love in Marriage: Moving Away from a Procreative Marriage Theology

July 22, 2009. The day was particularly beautiful; the sky was impossibly blue, dotted by wispy clouds. The light spilled into the coffee shop and across the floor, pooling on the floor next to my feet. It was the sort of place where you could hear the tumblers of your mind falling into place as you pieced thought together, as you tried to put cognition into words. Sitting across from the Nobel museum where the greatest thinkers and peacemakers in the world were immortalized, I could feel the presence of greatness in my midst. But let's be honest, the baristas were hot and the coffee was great, so I often found myself at Chokladkoppen when I needed to do some "work." That day was no different.

I had been here so many times that the baristas knew me by name. “Hey, the Mormon missionary is here!” Daniel shouted as I entered the café. After the baristas found out that I was doing research on the Church, I immediately became the most stereotypical religious person they knew. I was neither Mormon nor a missionary, but I appreciated the reception nonetheless.

The café was packed with tourists, as always, so I found an inconspicuous place near the kitchen. Johan was in the corner cutting up oranges and squeezing them into a large pitcher. Cut, squeeze, release. Cut, squeeze, release. He methodically prepared more and more juice, until the pitcher was filled with the fruit of his labor. As he placed the pitcher into the refrigerator, his eyes met mine. He smiled at me, and suddenly I was sixteen again—the year I realized that love did not follow the rules, the year I understood that nothing was worth having so much as something unattainable. He walked over, “Hej! How’s it going?” he said.

“It’s going pretty well!” I responded, trying to sound as casual as possible. “I just got back from a meeting with two church guys in Uppsala this morning. Thought I would come by and review what they said.”

He laughed with the uneasy skepticism of an unbeliever. It was the same laugh I received most often when I brought up the subject of religion to anyone in Sweden. “And what did they say?”

I thought about it for a second. How could I make this subject meaningful or even accessible to him without boring him to death. “I guess basically that the church is focusing its marriage theology on love and relationships.”

He laughed again, this time with a hint of “I-could-have-told-you-that” written across his face.

“Busy today?” I asked him, trying to keep the conversation moving.

“Like always. I got here at 10 and haven’t had a break yet,” he said. I looked at my watch. It was 2:35. “But I have to get back to work. Can I get you anything?”

“The usual... I mean, wait,” I said, recalling the phrase he taught me a few days earlier. “Jag vill ha moccachino bianco and blueberry pie.”

“Good!” he said. “But we’re out of blueberry pie. How about some white chocolate cheesecake instead?”

“Yeah, that’s be good,” I replied.

“Moccachino Bianco and blueberry pie it is then.” He turned around and headed back into the kitchen. I watched as he packed the espresso machine with grounds, delicate and yet strong. He cranked the levers and waited as the espresso came out, drip after incredulous drip. We were so different, Johan and I. I was always going, moving and impatient. He did everything with slow-motion care. He was muscular, athletic with long strawberry blonde hair. I was shorter, lean, with a short crew cut. In spite of our differences, or perhaps because of them, I was drawn to him. He came back over to deliver my coffee and dessert, what the Swedes call “fika.” His skin smelled of evergreen and peppermint gum, Christmas in the middle of July. He put his hand on my shoulder and placed the check on the table. His hand left a track like a comet over my skin and goose bump residue. I looked at the check, “\$0.00,” as expected. The check had become perfunctory, simply a means to “not get the other customers upset,” he would say. As he left, I turned my Ipod on to my interview and raised the oversized cup to my lips. I

noticed the chocolate syrup on the whipped cream in the shape of a heart and tried to think nothing of it.

Earlier that day, I had travelled to Uppsala to meet with Dr. Gören Möller and Dr. Anders Bjornberg, theologians in the Church of Sweden. The interview began to play, but I could only think about how fitting it must be that I had developed a crush on a guy at a coffee shop. So much of the language of love was about consumption: you devoured him with your eyes, you drank in the sight of him, you swallowed him whole. We viewed love as sustenance, something we could consume. Similarly, procreative sex sustains the church, by providing it with new believers. The church consumed the products of marriage in order to perpetuate its own ends. The words of Dr. Gören Möller came over my ear buds,

“I will say that the traditional attitudes that disapproved this change, they often referred to the Bible. And also, from a perspective of the creation, when they talked about man and woman as necessary for reproduction and there is something in the creation that God intended us, the relation to be between a man and a woman, the marriage...an important aim of marriage is reproduction.”⁹⁹

He continued, but I was distracted by Johan, who approached out of the corner of my eye. I pulled out one of my ear buds, Göran still chatting with me in the other.

“Hej! I was just talking to Daniel. He is having a dinner tonight and wanted to know if you were free,” he said.

“Sounds like fun! What time?” I asked, my attention now completely distracted from Göran’s chattering in the background.

“Seven,” he said.

“I’ll be there,” I replied.

“Cool,” he said, turning around to get back to work.

⁹⁹ Bjornberg, Anders, and Gören Möller. Personal interview. 21 June 2009.

As I replaced the missing ear bud, Göran was back in surround sound.

“And those who were in favor of changing minds in this question [of gay marriage], I think they argued much more in systematic theology and ethics. The conception of man and conception of God, and how God looks upon man and about who is a real man, and one who is homosexual must also be fully regarded as a full, complete man, human being. You cannot differ people from each other. For some you can make this comparison, it is almost the same question as white and black as it was before,” Göran said.

“You can say that an important argument has been that we would like to promote relations” responded Anders.

“Faithful and loveful relations,” Goran added.

Faithful and loveful relations, I thought. I picked up my mug and let the hot liquid trace the course of my throat. I pulled the mug from my lips, setting it down with a hollow clatter on the rough wooden table. The heart shaped syrup art had long since been sipped away. My parents always told me that it was similar values and a similar lifestyle that kept a husband and wife together—and passion came second. Maybe the church was finally taking my parents advice and focusing more on the relationships than the sex.

The coffee shop had calmed down quite a bit. It was between the mid-afternoon tourist rush and the dinner crowd. The Spice Girls were no longer singing about what they really really wanted, replaced instead with a mellow acoustic woman singing about love, in a language incomprehensible to me. I walked over to Johan who was finishing up the dishes before leaving for the day. He smiled as he finished scrubbing the plates. There was a familiarity in this situation, him at the sink and me at the counter. We had many

conversations over the summer like this. We talked about his family, coming out, religion, the rushing water always leaving me struggling to be heard, our words always mixing to make aqueous solutions of confusion.

“So tonight then?” I said, expectantly.

“Yeah, it’s gonna be fun” he responded. “My friend Heidi and Tomás are coming.”

Tomás, his ex-boyfriend. Awesome.

“Yes,” I tried to say with excitement, but the words came out bitter like coffee grounds.

I walked down Gamla Stan’s cobblestone alleyways, turning corners blindly until I found myself at the edge of the island. Clouds had turned the blue sky gray, and before I could find shelter, the clouds let out a devilish storm. I ran for cover under an awning. I watched as a man and woman huddled together under a single umbrella. A few seconds later another couple passed, also sharing one umbrella. I could not help but remember my discussion earlier in the summer with the Bishop of Lund, Antje Jeckelén, who said,

“We can think about marriage as an umbrella. The Church preaches the gospel, blessing, praying for these people, and listening to their vows. That is basically what the Church does. Society now says, well this umbrella is very big; it can provide protection also for same-sex couples. And the logical mistake that many people make is that they think that by using the same term for the relationship between same-sex couples, you sort of weaken it. But there is nothing that says that. Because if you have a big enough umbrella, the umbrella isn’t weaker if there are two or three people under it. I think Lutheran theology provides us with tools to look at this. From that perspective, if society chooses to widen the definition of marriage, that doesn’t destroy our central thinking about marriage. You still have relationships between people who want to live in committed, just, faithful, responsible relationships to each other. If they come to the church and want the support, want the prayer, want the blessing, who are we to deny them. So it is not a sacrament. It still means that it can have sacramental signs, in the sense that God’s grace is working through the institution of marriage.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Jeckelén, Antje. Personal interview. 4 Aug. 2009.

As I continued to watch the pedestrians, the sky gave no indication of relenting. I decided to make a dash for the metro station. It was only a few hundred meters away, but in my hurry I miscalculated the depth of a puddle and ended up ankle deep in water. When I finally got to the metro, I was soaked. The train seemed to crawl at a snail's pace towards my stop, and the short walk from the metro to my flat seemed eternal. My shoes were soaked, my feet swimming in the water still trapped in my sneakers. And to add insult to injury, by a queer trick of the fates, I approached my apartment building just as the rain died off and a glimmer of summer sun reappeared.

Typical, I thought to myself. *Note to self: make friends with an umbrella, or at least someone who's got one.*

I considered opting out of the party, but after a hot shower and a few *Friends* reruns, I felt rejuvenated and ready to take on the town. I got dressed in my most Swedish outfit: a pair of tight black pants, a vibrant green v-neck, and some brilliant white shoes that I had bought at H&M with Johan a few days earlier. I stopped by the grocery store to grab some hotdogs and buns for the picnic, before heading to the party. When I got to Daniel's apartment, they had already set up the event upstairs on their rooftop balcony. The weather had cleared up and besides needing to dry the chairs and table top, we were set to barbeque. I handed Daniel the hotdogs, and he gave me a weird look, surprised and perhaps amused. Expecting an American picnic smörgåsbord of hamburgers and hotdogs, I was surprised to find a delectable selection of vegetable kabobs and chicken breasts.

I guess the Swedes do barbeque a little different, I thought.

Johan, his friend, and his ex-boyfriend arrived after we had almost finished cooking. We sat down to eat, and suddenly I was in the spotlight.

“Where are you from?” Johan’s friend asked.

“Boston” I answered, “But I’m going to school in Atlanta.”

The conversation continue quite well. Perhaps too well, because before I knew it, the conversation had returned to Swedish. I was lost, so Daniel became my unofficial translator for the evening. Every few minutes, they would realize that I was lost and revert to English, only to once again slip back into their mother tongue.

After dinner, they treated me to a true Swedish camping delicacy. I expected a S’mores-like dessert, but instead, from underneath the grill, Daniel pulled out bananas stuffed with melted chocolate. I wanted to enjoy the dessert, but my attention kept falling on Johan and his “ex” boyfriend. This entire evening, and much of the summer, I felt like a plane in a holding pattern, making the turns with the airport in view and no clearance to land. “What do you think?” Daniel asked.

“Very good.” I pasted on a smile that felt gummy.

“I guess it’s an acquired taste,” he said.

I guess so am I, I thought. And I guess I’m going to the wedding alone.

After dinner, we continued to chat. I must have seemed particularly distant, because the conversation returned to me. Johan’s ex-boyfriend, Tomas, asked, “So what are you doing in Stockholm?”

“I’ve been talking with theologians and officials in the Church” I responded. “The Church of Sweden is one of the first church’s in the world to publically endorse gay marriage. I want to see how they were able to welcome gay marriage.”

Although Sweden’s progress towards a more inclusive form of marriage provides us with a hopeful outlook for homosexuals in the church, arguments within society and

the church remind us of the controversial nature of the issue. Sweden has been on the forefront of sexuality for quite some time. The early inception of contraception legislation, the evolution of sambo relationships, and the passage of same-sex partnerships discussed previously contributed to an environment conducive to same-sex marriage discussions. Until a couple of decades ago, marriage clearly referred to a relationship between a man and a woman. However, international opinion has changed in the past few years, with the passage of “gender-neutral” marriage legislation in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, South Africa, and Norway.¹⁰¹ These shifts resulted in pressure on the Riksdag to combine the Swedish Civil Partnership Act and the Marriage Act into a “gender-neutral” definition on 1 April 2009. This definition focused on the relationship of the partners rather than their sex. The state’s civic historical trajectory followed a much different path than the church’s trajectory on the issue of marriage. This path was originally traversed by the likes of Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther. They all focused their efforts on enforcing an understanding of marriage as strictly for procreation. In reaction to the Swedish government’s change, the Church of Sweden had to redefine its understanding of marriage or risk losing it all together. Church documents¹⁰² from this time period reveal that theologians reconciled the conflicting perspectives on marriage discussed in earlier chapters, by distinguishing love as alternative, preferred justification

¹⁰¹ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. Print. p. 30

¹⁰² This chapter will focus on the church’s documents as a means to understand the varied opinions that exist in the conversation. This should not be seen as exhaustive account of the various arguments for and against gay marriage. These are just the voices that existed within the Church of Sweden at the Synod in October 2009. I do not intend to report on my own theological perspectives on the subject. Instead, I hope to trace the evolution of the theology as it stands.

for marriage. This reconception promotes an understanding of marriage centered on emotional relationality as opposed to procreative sex.¹⁰³

Procreative Sex and Creation Theology

As identified in Chapter 2, the definition of marriage relied specifically on procreational sex, so we should not be surprised to find that the church was against a civil reconstruction of marriage that was gender-neutral. In response to the Riksdag's proposed gay marriage amendment, the church argued, "A traditional creation-theological line of argument in this matter is based on God having organized his creation in such a way that the union between man and woman is a prerequisite for the continued existence of the human race...Man and woman complete each other in that respect."¹⁰⁴ This argument requires a rather large leap of faith and a strong ascription to the early understandings of sexuality and marriage proposed by Augustine and Aquinas. Although a man and a woman are required to produce offspring, this argument does not entail that man and woman must marry in order to have these offspring. Only through an emphasis on creation theology does marriage take on a sexual dimension.

Leading up to the decision at the Church synod, the Church puts together an extensive document that brings together all of the opinions regarding the issues being discussed at the synod (all-church meeting). In the October 2009 synod, the church planned on discussing the issue of gay marriage. Within this document, a myriad opinions against revising the marriage theology circulated within the church, encouraging

¹⁰³ Just like any major social change, discussions regarding theological changes must always begin where things stand presently. Starting points differ greatly between individuals and groups. As a result there were numerous dialogues going on within the Church of Sweden. The debate included discussions about ecumenism, parenting, and church doctrine. Because of the differences in these preconditions, they cannot and will not be addressed in this text. Instead, this text will only explore the theological arguments for same sex marriage. Further exploration of other factors is necessary for a more full understanding of the debate.

¹⁰⁴ 2007:4

members to hold steadfast to its traditional understanding of marriage. One of the most popular opinions is represented by *Motion 2009:34*, in which members of the church proposed that the Church Board examine the possibility of maintaining two different understandings of marriage. The Church Board states, “there are theological arguments both for and against broadening the concept of marriage to also same-sex couples. The church Board considers that both these positions are compatible with the Church of Sweden’s confession and doctrine.”¹⁰⁵ They hoped that the two could exist in tandem with one another. However, the state’s precondition that the church must either accept gender-neutral marriage or relinquish all control over marriage made this solution impossible. *Church Board communication 2009:6*, another document that circulated prior to the synod meeting, proposed a gender-neutral understanding of marriage. In response, *Reservation 2: On the Understanding of Marriage*, said, “We therefore assert, with strong theological support in the Bible and our church’s confessional tradition, that marriage cannot be defined without reference to the sex of the contracting parties.”¹⁰⁶ This reservation very explicitly references the importance of procreative sex in the church’s understanding of marriage. There is no other justification for requiring the sex of the two partners to be opposite. Referencing back to procreative understandings of marriage described in Chapter 2, they hoped that the church would continue to consider marriage as the container for procreative sex.

The official position of the Church of Sweden on marriage was that marriage should be reserved for the relationship between one man and one woman. At the convention *Love, Cohabitation, and Marriage* discussed in Chapter 2, Ragnar Holte

¹⁰⁵ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 20

¹⁰⁶ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 35

summarizes the various theological arguments of the church of Sweden regarding marriage, saying,

“As created in the image of God, human beings are also created man and woman. (1) Marriage represents a union of the man and the woman. The two become one and that is a fundamental. (2) As a consequence of—but not a precondition for—this there is the assignment to continue procreation. Without the union of male and female, life cannot be born... The church’s creation theology is not dependent on what the state decides about marriage.”¹⁰⁷

Holte suggests that marriage must be between a man and a woman in order to continue the procreative power of heterosexual, Christian marriage. His statement presents creation theology, one of the strongest and most influential positions against gay marriage, as a reason to deny homosexuals a marriage liturgy.

An interesting thing happens to marriage when creation theology—and consequently sex—enters into the picture: marriage becomes more about the ability to procreate than about the relationship between the two individuals. As the Theological committee recognizes,

“A creation theology argument in favor of marriage only designating a relationship between a man and a woman is often based on the idea that the *purpose* of sexuality is to bring about a new life. Through the union of a man and a woman being able to give rise to a new life, people become co-creators with God. The ability to reproduce is the key to the continued existence of humanity.”¹⁰⁸

From this statement, we glean valuable information about the church’s understanding of marriage as a form of production; the church sees marriage as a conduit for procreation, which allows the body of Christ to expand. Marriage becomes the means to an end instead of the end in itself. This is not surprising since the procreative understanding of

¹⁰⁷ Holte, Ragnar. "Marriage and Cohabitation from a Systematic Theological Perspective." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 164-72. pp. 166

¹⁰⁸ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 30

marriage stems from Natural Law arguments. Ragnar Holte follows this line of argument when positioning him against homosexual marriages, saying, “The whole idea of a union of the two sexes in relationship in which they jointly give rise to a new life has no application.”¹⁰⁹ According to a logic that requires off-spring for marriage, there is no denying that the homosexual relationship does not constitute a Christian marriage; homosexuals cannot procreate and therefore, their relationships cannot constitute marriages from a creation theological perspective. The paradox of this argument is that it not only precludes same-sex couples from marriage, but it also precludes anything in heterosexual marriage that is motivated by pleasure alone. For some reason, this implication of the argument gets glanced over.

With this emphasis on procreative sex, many within the Church of Sweden disapproved of homosexual marriage. *Motion 2009:28* urges the Church of Sweden “to abide by the general Christian understanding of marriage as reserved for the relationship between one man and one woman...the way in which God instituted marriage was fundamental in that He create us as man and woman and let procreation—as a single function—be shared by two *bodies*”(emphasis mine).¹¹⁰ This church rhetoric speaks of marriage as an institution of bodies rather than a relationship of souls. These words seem to suggest that the biological abilities of the couple were more important than their spiritual relationship. The male body’s ability to procreate with a female body results in the Bible being read in such a way as to encourage a focusing on procreation, rather than mutual relationality.

Reading Procreative Sex into Biblical Theology

¹⁰⁹ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 31

¹¹⁰ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 10

Emphasizing the creational theological concept that man and woman procreate led over into biblical theology, causing theologians to focus specifically on procreative sex in unions. Biblical texts naturally play an important role in every Christian discussion of current social topics. Interestingly, in the entire Bible, there are remarkably few texts that deal with marriage, despite how theologically centered the issue has become. The issue is not mentioned explicitly in the Gospels, and in just a few places in both the Epistles and the Old Testament. In the places where authors do discuss marriage, the discussion rarely focuses its attention on the gendered pair or sexuality of the individuals. Still, for centuries theologians have read procreative definitions into these pericope.

Genesis 1:28-29 most clearly represents this point, where God recognizes the biological ability for man and woman to procreate and seems to charge them to use their capabilities to expand the kingdom of God. The text reads, “So God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”¹¹¹ The Swedish Church viewed this passage as an argument that God intended for marriage to be the site of procreation. In *Love, Cohabitation, and Marriage*, Ragnar Holte argued, “the blessing on fecundity is not always effective, and this was a problem even in Biblical times, yet it is only in a union of man and woman that children can be conceived and born in a natural way.”¹¹² This passage neither mentions marriage nor a union between the sexes. If read at face

¹¹¹ New Revised Standard Version of Bible

¹¹² Holte, Ragnar. "Marriage and Cohabitation from a Systematic Theological Perspective." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 164-72. pp. 167

value, then the passage speaks to a universal, biological truth that only through the combination of male sperm and female egg can a fetus arise. However, the pericope says nothing explicit about the understanding of marriage. Still, the Church of Sweden's document suggests that the church recognizes that only within marriage can sex occur, a notion that finds its origin in the creation theology established previously. This should be noted, since the text becomes the foundation for further theological reflection that excludes homosexuals from marriage.

The tradition of reading sex into marriage continued in Genesis 2:24, which says, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh."¹¹³ The use of "therefore" reminds us of the preceding passage, where God makes woman as a suitable helper for Adam. This joins the man and woman together in the eyes of the church; they come from the same origin. Members of the Church of Sweden focused specifically on the final part of the passage where the man and woman become one flesh, saying, "These words are important; on how a husband lives with his wife and 'they become one flesh.'"¹¹⁴ Again, traditional marriage theology places the focus of this passage on the physical and sexual relationship between man and woman which results in them becoming "one flesh" or having sexual intercourse. Because the woman came from the man, this sexual joining of the man to the woman seems appropriate, as if the woman and man were rejoining into their original form. Of course, this intercourse must be procreative, in order to stay true to the church's tradition

¹¹³ New Revised Standard Version of Bible

¹¹⁴ Holte, Ragnar. "Marriage and Cohabitation from a Systematic Theological Perspective." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 164-72. pp. 165

of procreation. This makes only relationships between a man and a woman conducive to marriage.

Matthew 19 refers back to Genesis, but this passage takes one step further suggesting that God's intention was to make man and woman so that they might procreate. Divine intention provides an even more persuasive argument for the bringing together of particularly sexed beings. This scripture finds Jesus referencing back to Genesis 2, saying, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."¹¹⁵ Jesus reinforces the importance of this text for the Church, giving the Church reason to favor relationships between man and woman. By suggesting that God ordained man and woman to be together, Ragnar Holte and similar thinking theologians had the confidence to state that only heterosexual marriage was permissible, saying, "Since Jesus' words of 'what God has joined together' refer so obviously to a man and a woman, this cannot be applied to a homosexual couple. It is up to the partners if they wish to give each other such a promise, but it cannot properly be described in the case of a church ceremony."¹¹⁶ The use of the word "obviously" in this statement suggests that tradition has engrained such a clear understanding of this passage on marriage as dealing only with man and woman that there is no way that two people of the same sex could qualify for marriage in the Christian context. Ragnar Holte's statement creates an

¹¹⁵ New Revised Standard Version of Bible

¹¹⁶ Holte, Ragnar. "Marriage and Cohabitation from a Systematic Theological Perspective." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 164-72. pp. 167

interesting dichotomy, as he posits that homosexuals can have a strong relationship with one another, but their sex is what precludes them from getting married.

Another document that arose during the pre-synod discussion period was *Reservation 2*, which argues against the gender-neutral liturgy proposal of the Church of Sweden, by focusing on the fundamental will of God which is expressed in the words of Jesus. The document reinforces the idea that God favors relationships between men and women, saying,

“A highly significant text for the interpretation of the Christian understanding of marriage is Matthew 19, where Christ is asked for his opinion about marriage...Christ concludes his reply by saying that not everyone is intended for marriage...What is more even more important is that [Jesus] gives testimony to the fundamental will of God in creation: ‘That he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,’ and ‘they shall be one flesh.’”¹¹⁷

The case seems fairly open and closed, since Jesus speaks of God’s intentions being to create man and woman and make them one flesh. Interestingly, in all of these discussions of marriage, there is no discussion of relationships or an understanding of how the institution of marriage reinforces our understanding of how marriage is in fact a sacramental institution, as Aquinas argued in Chapter 2.

Traditionalists argue that the relationship between God and humanity is even further reflected through the marriage of a man and woman. Ephesians 5:31-32 is the first text that specifically relates the union of man and woman to God’s relationship with humanity. Marriage is seen as mirroring the relationship between Christ and the church, saying, “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about

¹¹⁷ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 36

Christ and the church.”¹¹⁸ This passage confirms the theological argument that the joining of the man and woman is preferred above other relationships. Ragnar Holte reminds the church, “Each individual human being is created as complete in God’s image, but a man and a woman united as one represent a more complete form of humanity, and in this way, are an image in a special sense of the God of Love.”¹¹⁹ In other words, each homosexual is made in God’s image, but when a homosexual couple comes together, they are lacking the two sexes that reflect a completed humanity. Thus, the special sense of God is missing in their relationship. As a result, their marriage does not represent Christ and the Church in the same way. This reading focuses its attention squarely on the procreative abilities of the partners as their sole means for representing God. They focus on the complementarity of the male and female biological organs, because otherwise any two people could compliment each other. This suggests that God takes on temporal and creative reality.

When the biblical passages focus more on the procreative sex and less on the relationships formed in marriage, then biblical passages become biological arguments rather than theological arguments. Although reading procreative sex into these passages is a way for the church to regain the power that they once had over their populace, it has resulted in an institution that no longer adequately reflects God’s relationship with man, as Ephesians prescribes. It seems to follow that the church sees the relationship between God and man to be primarily temporal and physical, rather than spiritual and relational. This seems counter to the teachings of Aquinas and Luther’s marriage theology, despite it

¹¹⁸ New Revised Standard Version of Bible

¹¹⁹ Holte, Ragnar. "Marriage and Cohabitation from a Systematic Theological Perspective." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 164-72. pp. 166

being a natural consequence of their arguments. What we must remember is that the content of marriage has not been static throughout history. There is a risk that in its order of marriage, the Church implicitly presupposes that the form of marriage that exists today is pleasing to God.

Some maintained that tradition had always held that marriage represented God's essence through the joining of a man and a woman in procreative relationships. However, others recognized that the Church had become so focused on sex and sexuality in marriage that it had lost sight of the true purpose of marriage. They argued that true marriage required faithful, loving companionship, rather than sex. They urged the church to discuss new theological interpretations that might transform marriage into an institution that better reflects God's grace on Earth.

In the Midst of Change: Diversity of Opinion in the Church of Sweden

Discussions regarding whether the current understanding of marriage reflected divine intentions ensued, resulting in dissonance within the Church. Two motions were proposed to the Church synod that worried about the potential fracturing of church unity along the lines of marriage. The first, *Motion 2009:34*, states, "the earlier unity in the Church of Sweden about the understanding of marriage has been lost...this fragmented and incompatible understanding of marriage will be manifested in an equally fragmented preaching and teaching."¹²⁰ They went on to instruct the Church Board to examine how the church could harbor two conflicting opinions. A second motion, *Motion 2009:50*, read similarly, "if the Church Board's proposal were adopted, there would be conflict with the Church of Sweden's Lutheran Doctrine."¹²¹ To these concerns about church

¹²⁰ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009.

¹²¹ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009.

division, Normunds Kamergrauzis directs the Church to the notion of *status confessionis*, which holds that a diversity of opinion on issues that are not totally contradictory to Christian beliefs can exist within the church.

Ronald Preston reminds those against allowing multiple opinions of marriage within the church that, “Christians who support the wider use of the *status confessionis* seriously misunderstand the Christian faith, and that it only works if the ideology is totally false and the practice also corresponds with the ideology. In the case of apartheid this appears to be the case. For other issues, it appears to be much too blunt an instrument to be helpful in dealing with the ambiguities.”¹²² Unlike apartheid, which is blatantly against all Christian church teachings, gender-neutral marriage does not so totally differ from the Christian teachings that two opinions of marriage cannot exist within the Church. Certainly, homosexual marriage does not fit into the procreative sexual emphasis that the church developed as a result of Augustine. However, homosexual marriages do have the qualities of relation that both Aquinas and Luther discuss. Because multiple understandings of marriage exist even in the most classical understandings of marriage, it seems valid to have multiple understandings of marriage in contemporary discussion. Fragmentation within the church on the issue of marriage is not necessarily a bad thing, and the challenges that division can present might help the church better understand its doctrines.

Still, many questioned the intentions of theologians in the Church, since a change in Church doctrine came so rapidly after the state’s decision. Interestingly, many of the more recent decisions within the Church of Sweden—including contraception, ordination of women and civil partnership blessings—have concerned the consequences of secular

¹²² Preston, Ronald H. *Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim, 1993. p. 86

rules and regulations. Furthermore, we must remember that the original church decisions about marriage, which focused on the man and woman because Roman marriage required a man and woman. Secular understandings of marriage have always been influential, because marriage has always been a secular institution. Still, this raises questions regarding from whom the Church of Sweden receives its orders. Is the Church only changing its theology because the civil authorities are pressuring it? And if so, is that an adequate reason for changing their theology?

Understanding Lutheran Marriage Theology

The gut reaction for many might be to say “No!” However, an analysis of the Lutheran theology on marriage suggests that the cues taken by the Church of Sweden from the state are conducive with Lutheran understanding of marriage. Marriage is a universal phenomenon that existed prior to the biblical revelation. From an evangelical Lutheran point of view, marriage is a civil arrangement and can be justified based on Creation. In their proposal for a same-sex marriage liturgy, the Theological committee argued, “Marriage according to the Evangelical Lutheran tradition is an institution in creation and in society, not a sacrament. This means, among other things, that marriage is perceived as the same thing, regardless of whether it is a civil marriage or a marriage within a faith community. What is constitutive for marriage are the mutual vows and a public declaration of consent.”¹²³ The Church of Sweden believes that the blessing and prayers used in a religious marriage only have significance to those entering into the marriage, but do not set apart religious marriage from civil marriage. The two are equally part of creation. As a part of God’s ongoing creation, marriage naturally will shift in

¹²³ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 29

definition, and the Lutheran understanding is that the Church must shift with that understanding. As Antje Jeckelén reminded us, just because the civil marriage umbrella has gotten larger and more people can fit underneath it, does not make the umbrella any less waterproof.

This does not absolve the Theological committee of their responsibility to keep the Church theologically conditioned. Since marriage has traditionally been explained by reading passages from the Bible and interpreting these within the scope of the wedding service, the church Theological committee is responsible for either making relevant the scriptural passages regarding marriage or opting to revoke the church's responsibility to perform marriages all together. In *Official Communication KsSkr 2009:6*, which the Church Board released in June before the Church synod, the Church Board stated, "Those who would have preferred to see the term 'marriage' reserved for the relationship between a man and a woman must now in the current situation decide whether the broadened concept of marriage is such an important issue that it should result in the Church declining to apply for the right to conduct marriage."¹²⁴ Some argued for the total relinquishing of the Church's power over marriage, in order to stay true a creation theology that focused specifically on procreative sex in marriage. Others encouraged a rethinking of the marriage order. They envisioned a new understanding of marriage that accentuated the loving relationship of people within the marriage. The Theological committee took this perspective and analyzed each of the major theological texts again, this time without focusing on procreative sex.

Love and Marriage in Sweden

¹²⁴ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p.13; *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 10

Although this argument seems novel and fresh, theologians Gustaf Wingren and Walter Kasper proposed similar theologies long before the Church even considered accepting gay people in the church. Gustaf Wingren emphasized, “the structures of the Creation are flexible—and must be so in order to be an instrument of God’s actions through arrangements that focus on love and the needs of our neighbor.”¹²⁵ Wingren focuses his theology on love for the neighbor rather than emphasizing particular constraints on marriage, such as sex, which society implemented. He calls for society to be as flexible with its theology as God is flexible with God’s creation. Six years later, Walter Kasper, a Catholic theologian, wrote in *Karlek och trohet. Om det kristna aktenskapets teologi* (*Love and fidelity. On the theology of Christian marriage*), “We no longer consider procreation as the integrating factor but rather mutual love and fidelity. We must therefore try to determine the meaning of marriage and of the human person, not in terms of an abstract ‘nature’ but rather relationally.”¹²⁶ He urged the church to focus more heavily on the relationality of the two partners rather than the sex and the children produced by the relationship. The two theologians understood marriage and sexuality to have purposes in addition to bringing about new life. The institution provided a framework for supporting, protecting, and developing mutual love between the partners and gave them support in their life together.

We saw in Chapter 1 that the Swedes bucked traditional marriage, opting for non-traditional forms of cohabitation instead. They preferred the institution of sambo, which required strong commitments by the two partners to one another. This Swedish emphasis

¹²⁵ Wingren, Gustaf. *Etik Och Kristen Tro*. Lund, København. Oslo: CWK Gleerup, Gyldendal, Universitetsforlaget, 1971.

¹²⁶ Kasper, Walter. *Kärllek Och Trohet. Om Det Kristna Aktenskapets Teologi*. Uppsala: Katolska Bokförlaget, 1980. p. 17

on commitment rather than tradition will become an integral part of the new theology for marriage. Social and theological understandings of marriage have shifted the emphasis of marriage to love and fellowship. During the gender-neutral marriage debate, some felt that the changes in church doctrine were illegitimate and forced by civil pressures. They argued that this line of thinking was proposed only to accept homosexuals into the church without real theological grounding.

These skeptics need only look to the writings of Wingren and Kasper to find that the notion of a love centered marriage has a long historical lineage. First, these arguments came long before homosexuality was even accepted in the Church. Second, they came from theologians within the Catholic church, a denomination that to this day does not accept homosexuality or gender-neutral marriage. These facts suggest that this new love-centered understanding of marriage is not as a result of civil understandings of marriage and can be viewed as a legitimate theological solution to the Church's problem with accepting gender-neutral marriage.

Love became the lens through which the marriage scriptures were read. The Theological committee describes how the Bible's primary message is God's love, which suggests that every passage must reflect that understanding.¹²⁷ They remind the Church, "The three dominant traditions in the New Testament—Paul, the synoptic Gospels and John—are all in agreement on the commandment of love being superior to all commandments and prohibitions."¹²⁸ Scripture is imbued with the notion that love is invariably supreme, which is supported by Christ's ethical core of belief in the dual

¹²⁷ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 33

¹²⁸ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 34

commandment of love, which urges Christians to love God and love their neighbor. Christ's message within the New Testament,¹²⁹ suggests that mutual, responsible relationships characterized by love and kindness between people of the same sex are equally respectable under biblical theology.

Towards a new (Gay) Marriage Theology

Similar to the sex-centered understanding of marriage, a love-centered understanding of marriage must begin with a discussion of complementarity, as it provides the foundation on which we will analyze all biblical texts. Instead of a biologically based concept of complementarity, the starting point in this new theology is a complementarity anchored in the personal fellowship between spouses. This argument works both for heterosexual and homosexual relationships. In fact it works for all relationships. The word "gay" appears in parenthesis for this section's subtitle, because while many claim that this theology is specific to benefiting homosexuals, it has positive implications on heterosexuals as well. It reduces the patriarchal power struggles that pervade traditional marriage forms, providing partners with equal standing.

From this perspective, man and woman do not compliment each other because of sexual, biological reasons, but rather they accentuate each other's innate emotional and spiritual qualities. In *Uppdrag samliv (Mission: Live Together)*, Carl Reinhold Brakenhielm, Mikael Lindfelt, and Johanna Gustafsson Lundberg propose how sex can be one of many complimentary aspects of a relationship, saying, "An alternative way of thinking, however, is to emphasize the fellowship between persons as a primary human relationship instead of sexual union. Love, kindness, and emotional commitment do not only exist between men and women...People are created in God's image, created for a

¹²⁹ These texts include John 3:16, Romans 4:25, Galatians 2:21, Matthew 7:12, and John 13:34.

personal fellowship between ‘You and I.’”¹³⁰ Brakenhielm et al. remind us that while marriage is an important metaphor for God and for the relationship between God and man, the gender aspect is not the core part of this metaphor. A personal fellowship characterized by love contains a wealth of other relevant aspects that equally depict the human relationship with God. With this logic, same-sex couples that have strong interpersonal relationship can also contain the complementarity that reflects the essence of God, despite their inability to produce offspring.

The Doctrine Committee agreed with this new understanding of complementarity that focused on innate, emotional connections rather than complimentary sexual organs. In their document to the Church synod, they wrote,

“We are created not just as man and woman but also with different characteristics and drives. We do not relate to one another simply as “hand” and “glove” or as combinations of opposites such as strong/weak and active/passive...Differences between individuals are greater than those between women and men as groups. The Commission therefore, refrains from giving prominence to the value of gender complementarity, preferring instead to stress the complementarity of individuals.”¹³¹

This public declaration against the complementarity of gendered bodies is a huge step towards the inclusion of same-sex marriage. This represents a 180° change from Ragnar Holte’s proclamation that “Each individual human being is created is complete in God’s image, but a man and a woman united as one represent a more complete form of humanity.”¹³² The Doctrine committee focuses its theology on the fact that the central feature of marriage is two person’s choice of each other as unique partners in life. The complementarity of individuals is not dependent on their sex, meaning that same-sex

¹³⁰ Lindfelt, Mikael, Lundberg Johanna, Gustafsson, and Carl Reinhold Brakenhielm. *Uppdrag Samliv: Om Aktenskap Och Samlevnad*. Stockholm: Verbum, 2007. p. 19

¹³¹ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 31

¹³² Holte, Ragnar. "Marriage and Cohabitation from a Systematic Theological Perspective." *Love, Cohabitation and Marriage: Report from a Public Hearing*. Uppsala: Svenskkyrkan, 2004. 164-72. pp. 166

marriage could be affirmed doctrinally, despite Holte's arguments. This understanding of marriage has even further reaching implications than just same-sex couples. It opens marriage up to unions that do not ascribe to patriarchy or domineering. We can explore relationships of equality, since one person is not using the other person as the means for procreation.

While this argument dealt with the issue of complementarity in creation theology, it still did not deal with the issue of procreation that fulfilled God's call to "be fruitful and multiply." Some would argue that procreation is lost on the homosexual couple, because they do not have the ability to raise a child. Others would argue that child rearing is not lost on the homosexual couple, because they still have the ability to raise children despite their inability to physically produce any. For these people, being a parent is not just about bearing a child, but also about bearing witness to its life. The Theological committee argues, "Homosexuals can also contribute to the responsibility for caring for children, even if they are unable to produce biological children together...they participate in reproduction in the broad sense."¹³³ Homosexuals as child raisers contributes to the new, more broad way of thinking about marriage as being the container for love and care for others. Not only does marriage contain love between partners, but it also contains love for children. According to this new way of thinking, the purpose of the arrangement of Creation, including marriage, is to serve people—they are to help us show love to our fellow human beings. This is truly a liberating idea that helps to inform the reading of some of the most important Biblical texts regarding marriage, liberating not only for

¹³³ *Information on a possible decision by the Church of Sweden regarding same-sex marriage*. Issue brief no. KsSkr 2009:6. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 32

same-sex couples who wish to marry in the church, but also to women mired in a patriarchal regime of marriage.

With this re-understood Creation theology that speaks more to mutual love for the neighbor and a complementarity based on factors other than sex, biblical theology regarding marriage can also change drastically. Theologians previously focused on the sexual complementarity of man and woman in Genesis 1:27-28. If theologians invoke this new focus on love instead of sex, then they might view same-sex couples as applicable to the text. In *Uppdrag Samliv: Om Aktenskap Och Samlevnad*, Swedish theologian Margareta Brandby-Coster analyzes the Genesis passage in just this way, saying, “God says, ‘It is not Good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ The Hebrew word (kenagdo), which is translated by ‘who befits honom’ (suits him), also means ‘who is his equivalent’...It is therefore not a question of the man having the woman as a servant or sexual partner but rather of a person—a man or a woman—not being able to live without there being someone to answer when he or she speaks.”¹³⁴ The implication of her translation is that it does not matter whether the bond is formed between people of different sexes or the same sex; the strength of the relationship is equivalent. The important thing is the relationship, rather than the offspring that results from the marriage. Under the old theology, she considers the partner a “servant” or a “sex slave,” both of which suggest that one partner uses the other for a particular end. This non-symbiotic relationship results when sex and bodies are more important than relationships. This analysis, and its ability to reframe the understanding of marriage in this early text, is particularly significant, because, of its wide implications on making

¹³⁴ Lindfelt, Mikael, Lundberg Johanna. Gustafsson, and Carl Reinhold Brakenhielm. *Uppdrag Samliv: Om Aktenskap Och Samlevnad*. Stockholm: Verbum, 2007. p. 70

marriage an equal institution for all participants. Not only does it mean that same sex couples can participate in marriage, but it stresses that all partners in the relationship should have equal status. This text becomes the backbone for the rest of the biblical interpretations in the bible. For instance, Ephesians 5:31-32 directly refers back to the text. A rethinking of Genesis 1:27-28 means a rethinking of the Ephesians text as well.

Traditional arguments against gay marriage cite Matthew 19, making anachronistic arguments that Jesus adopted a position against same-sex partnerships.¹³⁵ However, this new understanding of marriage suggested that Jesus might actually be calling for fidelity within marriage, since gay identity did not exist during biblical times. Despite the difference between the passage in Matthew and the present situation, the overall theme of love within marriage can be applied in order to make the scripture relevant. If the point is that fidelity has been part of the intention of marriage from the beginning, then the passage equally applies to same-sex relationships. Therefore, the life long relationships that Jesus speaks of when discussing the creation story can equally be entered into by same sex couples as heterosexual couples. The factor is no longer the sexes of the individuals entering into union, but rather the kind of fellowship between the persons. The focus has shifted from procreative sex to love and interrelationality.

At the end of their report, the Church Board remembers a 1995 church debate after same sex partnerships were legalized in Sweden. The church agreed, "In a church the ultimate question is not who appears to be right or who wins the debate but whether love has taken its place in each person's heart. The ancient theological counsel is

¹³⁵ Arguments that concern Jesus speaking out against homosexuality in the Bible are anachronistic, because homosexuality as a concept did not exist until Karl-Maria Kertbeny first used the word in a German pamphlet in 1869, arguing against an anti-sodomy law. Feray, Jean-Claude; Herzer, Manfred (1990). "Homosexual Studies and Politics in the 19th Century: Karl Maria Kertbeny". *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 19, No. 1.

therefore applicable in this matter: in which is essential, unity; in what can be discussed, freedom; in everything, love.”¹³⁶ In the issue of gender-neutral marriage, the church finally is understanding the significance of this message. Most are finding that love should undergird the relationship of marriage, rather than procreative sex. And for those who do not, they are recognizing the value of diversity, understanding that gay marriage does not so totally contradict Christian teachings to require *status confessionis*. Instead, it is acceptable for multiple opinions to exist.

What we have seen in only a few years is a shift in what was traditionally a procreative-sex-centered understanding of marriage (as was described in Chapter 2) into a love-centered understanding of marriage. Church of Sweden’s theological committee no longer reads sex into the passages regarding marriage, instead focusing on the interpersonal relationship between the members of the union. Many within the Church worry that the church has taken too many liberties and are too affected by civil decisions to uphold the traditions of the church. However, theologians from long before the debate began, like Wingren and Kasper, can reassure the Church that this position is credible. We should recognize that the church is moving away from a very strongly held tradition of marriage. However, we should also note that the church is moving towards a fuller representation of God, a God not reliant on physicality or temporality, but of relationality. This change not only benefits the homosexual relationship, but also makes significant changes to the patriarchal understanding of marriage. It becomes an equalizer of the roles of husband and wife. In this way, marriage once again fulfills its purpose of representing “Christ and the Church.” Could it be that in rethinking marriage to better accommodate myriad differences in marital forms, the Church has reclaimed the sacramental form of

¹³⁶ *Wedding and Marriage*. Issue brief no. G 2009:2. Uppsala: Skenska kyrkan, 2009. p. 33

marriage it lost when it began focusing so heavily on sex? Might it be that in the very “marriage-wrecking” behaviors that traditional theologians condemn, the church might actually be re-sacramentalizing marriage?

CONCLUSION

Four minutes after eleven—I hated being late. The sky was a pale blue, and there wasn't a hint of rain. I tried to enter the cathedral inconspicuously, but as I walked into the crowded sanctuary, the only sound in the entire place seemed to be coming from my rubber-soled shoes. I tried to avoid the angry glares from two middle-aged women as I scanned the building for a place to sit. The cathedral was beautifully simple. At the front of the sanctuary was an alter with two large taper candles and a crystal cross in the center. The walls were regal with crown molding and warm with wainscoting. From the arched windows, the sun shown brilliantly through smudged glass. It smelled of stories and history, like my grandparent's house, but with the freshness of spring. I continued my scan, trying to find a familiar face, but none come into view. I was getting desperate, so I found the friendliest people I could find.

I sat down next to an elderly couple, his hair sprinkled with age and gray, hers still sitting stiff in a perm. Their wrinkles fit into one another's like a glove. The organist began playing a beautiful, albeit unrecognizable, piece of classical music. Was it beginning? Where were the best men, the groom? I began to panic a little. After hours spent watching TLC's *A Wedding Story* after school, I considered myself a wedding aficionado, and as any aficionado knew, the organ signaled the flower girl, followed by a pageant full of bridesmaids. I looked around to see if anyone else had figured out the problem, but everyone else sat there content. As I turned my head around, I watched as the narthex doors opened, and Are and Kristian stood together, hands intertwined. Where was the ring bearer, the father-of-the-bride, the Bridal Chorus? Where was the wedding I was familiar with?

I took a second to compose myself. Meanwhile, Are and Kristian began walking down the center aisle together. Are wore a gray suit with a white shirt and a skinny dark gray tie. Kristian looked dapper in his black suit, deep red shirt, and black bow tie. On Are's breast, a red rose to match Kristian's shirt, on Kristian's a white rose. They were beaming. As they approached the altar, the priest met them. She was a short woman with a white robe. Her stole was all the colors of the rainbow, appropriate indeed. As she spoke, I tried to focus on what she was saying, but who was I kidding. I had barely learned enough Swedish to order myself a coffee and a cinnamon roll from Chokladkoppen.

As the music ended, the two men turned to one another. They stared at one another for a second; their looks had a certain poetry that was framed by the growing silence around them. It was a moment that sent chills down my spine. I had seen gay men

in relationships before, but never had I seen them in such an emotionally intimate situation. Each seemed humbled by and invested in the other. As they vowed to each other, I couldn't help but think about how different gay marriages in Boston seemed. The relationship between Are and Kristian held equal validity under the law as those in Boston, but there seemed to be a spiritual component to their relationship that other relationships lacked.

I had been accustomed to seeing relationships more focused on sex and pleasure. The couples inadvertently became consumed with the purposes of marriage as procreative and sexual, rather than concerned with their emotional and spiritual connection. These relationships were what Martin Buber would consider an *I-It* relationship. Buber describes *I-It* relationships, saying, "The primary relation of man to the world of *It* is comprised in *experiencing*, which continually reconstitutes the world, and *using* which leads the world to its manifold aim, the *sustaining*, relieving and equipping of human life" (emphasis mine).¹³⁷ For Buber, humans maintained *I-It* relationships by reducing people and things to objects to use or have. When the Church framed marriage in a procreative sense, the religious institution of marriage took on an *I-It* quality. The goal of the marital relationship became about *experiencing* sex, *using* the other person for physical needs, and *sustaining* life through procreation. The Church implicitly accepted the objectifying *I-It* relationships characteristics of marriage, even though they did not reflect the Divine. These were the relationships I experienced most often. I couldn't help but think back to Axel, the guy I met on the train earlier in the summer. I had completely objectified him and our friendship, seeing him as a sexual

¹³⁷ Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Trans. Ronald Grego Smith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1957. p. 38

conquest rather than a potential relationship. I made our interaction into an *I-It* relationship, instead of an *I-Thou* relationship.

In contrast, Are and Kristian's relationship reflected the Church of Sweden's new theology, which understood marriage as a spiritual relationship between a couple. Martin Buber would consider this relationship an *I-Thou* relationship, which reflected Christ's focus on intimate fellowships with humans. Christ saw each person as a spirit with which to relate, rather than simply an object to consume. Christ related to the "least and the last," to the lepers and the prostitutes, the tax collectors, foreigners (and maybe even sexual deviants).

While Christ's example of relationality with his followers literally represented an *I-Thou* relationship, Buber recognized intense relations of interconnectedness as having *I-Thou* qualities as well. Buber considered the relationship between a human and God to exist within strong, relationships between individuals, saying, "Love does not cling to the *I* in such a way as to have the *Thou* only for its 'content,' its object, but love is between *I* and *Thou*."¹³⁸ Unlike *I-It* relationships where love might mean using a partner for sexual pleasure or for a purpose, love in an *I-Thou* relationship meant that the partners experienced a cooperative, symbiotic relationship.

If we think back to the natural law logic that Aquinas and Luther use to understand marriage, then we are reminded that much of the Church's original theology of marriage is founded on the functionality of marriage as a means for procreation. This construction suggests that traditional, Christian marriage is an *I-It* relationship. The church has adopted an objectifying way of thinking about marriage that reduces marriage

¹³⁸ Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Trans. Ronald Grego Smith. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1957. p. 14

to procreative sex, rather than modes of relation, reducing marriage once again to a secular, rather than sacramental institution. Buber would say this formulation of marriage did not contain the presence of God, making them not sacramental.

When Are and Kristian completed their vows, the priest stepped near to them. She asked them to kneel at the altar. She raised her hands into the air and said some words. Then she lifted her hand in the air and made the shape of a cross in the air. *This was it*, I thought. This was the moment that gay people had been fighting for, the moment that the church had been fighting for: the blessing of same-sex couples. Up until this point in the service, the only specifically religious aspects of the service were the location and the priest. Otherwise, the marriage could have been a secular service. However, the priest's blessing represented the church's affirmation of the joining together of two men in marriage. The blessing meant that the church truly did believe that gay marriage could be acceptable in the eyes of God. They had traded in their procreative understanding of marriage for a marriage contingent on "loveful"¹³⁹ relationships.

Despite a growing majority who had adopted this new understanding of marriage, there were still many within the church who argued against the Church of Sweden's change in theology. As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, the Church was full of people who believed that the swiftness of the decision gave little credence to the decision. Many, like the activists standing outside of the Massachusetts capital building, believed that this represented the devolution of the Christian Church's teachings. They bought into the Church's traditional theological perspective that marriage was a container for procreative sex, meaning that only heterosexual couples could participate. They closely read the scriptures and noticed only the markers for heterosexual exclusivity within marriage.

¹³⁹ Bjornberg, Anders, and Gören Möller. Personal interview. 21 June 2009.

They used the Bible and tradition as decoration for their own pre-existing moral structures.¹⁴⁰

I would like to posit a different perspective on the subject, namely that this new understanding of marriage might actually fulfill the true intentions of marriage. In Chapter 4, Ephesians 5:32 provided us with a helpful understanding of the purpose of marriage, saying, “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”¹⁴¹ In this pericope, marriage was related to the relationship between God and humanity, Jesus and the Church. If we recognized the Church’s traditional emphasis on procreative sex in marriage and the use of marriage as a means for satiating sexual desire, then marriage took on an *I-It* relationship. Buber would argue that this form of relationship was not reflective of God’s essence. Thus, the traditional understanding of marriage failed in its attempt to reflect God’s nature on Earth, diminishing its sacramental quality. However, if we understand marriage through the Swedish Church’s new theology of love and relationality, then marriage begins to resonate with Buber’s understanding of an *I-Thou* relationship.

Interestingly, in the very shift in understanding that many consider the devolution of Church doctrine, the Church was in fact returning to marriage’s original intention. When the Bible described marriage as the relationship between man and God, it might quite literally be referring to an *I-Thou* relationship. If we took Buber’s understanding of

¹⁴⁰ Although many in theologians in the church still ascribe to a procreative definition of marriage, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the present dialogue between some theologians regarding the non-procreational benefits and ends of marriage. There have been many articles and books written on the value and essential nature of spiritual and emotional intimacy within marriage. While these discussions are still greatly muffled by the louder, more prominent procreational understanding of marriage, they nevertheless exist and should be acknowledged here.

¹⁴¹ New Revised Standard Version of Bible

God to be true, then the relationships promoted by this new understanding of marriage served as a resacramentalization of marriage. The theology promoted mutual, symbiotic, and “lovelful” relationships between couples, rather than the procreative, consumptive sexual relationships once hinted at in the biblical theology. We see a transition from the Church focusing on a conception of marriage that fell under the *I-It* category to a conception of marriage that had *I-Thou* qualities.

The socially radical form of this change may be short term with the opening up of marriage to gay and lesbian partners. However, the truly radical form of this change is in the long-term implication of this decision on marriages of all sexualities. By promoting loving relationships rather than relationship forms that encourage the use of partners for particular means, this new marriage theology discourages the patriarchal, hierarchal relationship forms that have arisen from the church’s original procreative understand of marriage.

As Are and Kristian stood up from the altar, seeing the looks in their eyes, I could not help but think that this was a good thing, not just for them, but for all marriages. The priest said something which I translated as: “I now pronounce you husband and husband.” The crowd clapped, and the happy couple walked down the aisle once again, this time the happily *married* couple. We all processed out and greeted them outside with confetti and celebration.

After the reception, I found myself wandering the streets of Stockholm, absorbing the last few moments I had in the city. I passed by Roxy, the mixed gay/straight bar I went to my first weekend in Stockholm. The place was just filling up for the night. I wondered what it would be like to return to bars and clubs in America, knowing they

would be exclusively “gay” or “straight.” The integration I experienced in Sweden was a product of years of progressive legislation, beginning with the legalization of contraception in the 1940s, the rejection of homosexuality as an illness in the 1950’s, the acceptance of sambo rights in 1980s, the creation of same-sex civil partnerships in 1995, and finally the integration of gender-neutral marriage in 2009. The civil trajectory worked in tandem with the religious work in order to push the church to more fully understand marriage. I could not help but think about how these civil pressures paved the way and provided the nudges needed for the Church of Sweden to make its way to this revelatory same-sex marriage theology.

As I thought about my return, I recognized the fact that the country to which I would return had not undergone the same legal shifts as Sweden. As of 2010, only Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Washington D.C. have legalized same-sex marriage. This state-by-state method may take years before same-sex marriages are fully accepted in all fifty states. Even if all fifty states legalized gay marriage, there is still no legal reason that the Church must follow suit. Unlike in Sweden where the institution of marriage is understood in such a way that the Church can either comply with civil understandings of marriage or revoke marriage rights all together, in the United States, church’s perform ceremonies separate from the civil authorities. Churches in America do not have the right to perform legally binding ceremonies. As a result, they will not have to conform to legal understandings of marriage. Furthermore, the society does not enjoy options like sambo that encourage partners to personally commit to loving relationships without the pressure of marriage. All of this is to say, that while the Church of Sweden’s process in redefining marriage theology might serve as a

model for other countries and churches facing similar theological debates, each debate will occur in its own manner and within its own cultural context. Despite finding a positive model for amending gay marriage theology, we should not expect the change to occur the same way in the US as in Sweden.

The sun was beginning to set now, as I made my way across the bridge from Södermalm to Gamla Stan. I walked down the dim maze of cobbled streets. My feet knew the path well, and I almost did not have to think until I got to Chokladkoppen. It seemed like just yesterday I first stepped foot in the coffee shop, and now I was about to leave. The tourists had long since gone home and even most of the restaurant owners had closed shop for the night. Still, as I looked across the plaza, the lights from the coffee shop glowed through the service window. I walked towards the light like a moth in the heat of the summer night.

When I got to the door, Johan greeted me.

“Hej,” he said. “How was the wedding?”

“It was pretty good,” I responded, before going on in some detail about how awesome it was to finally see two guys getting married in a church. I explained how I had never expected to see something like that in a church. He chuckled a little bit.

“You won’t see that very much when you go back to the States, I bet,” he said.

“Definitely not! We can barely accept gay people period, let alone gay people in relationships,” I said.

“I can’t even imagine,” he said. “I’d really like to visit sometime.”

“Yeah, that would be awesome!” I replied.

“But just as friends, you know?” he said.

As Johan went to give me a hug, our eyes met. In that connection, I finally *knew*. Johan and I would never have the relationship I expected at the beginning of the summer, because I began my research with a view of love constructed by the church, favoring an understanding of marriage and relationships that relied on sexuality. I overlooked the value of strong relationship with friends, something far more important than any sexual intimacy I could imagine. As I spoke with Church leaders and delved into church doctrines, I found my own understanding of marriage changing as well. The Church of Sweden reminded me and can remind us all of the importance of relationships and the need for strong, interpersonal connections between individuals. These relationships might look odd to the traditionalist, but their substances are rich with spirituality. They reflect Martin Buber's understanding of *I-Thou*, and in that reflection, they manifest the essence of God on Earth.