

ing shape, but it will put further strain on the social fabric of a post-same-sex-marriage America. Maintaining a rich and respectful public conversation about the meaning of marriage is hard work, but abandoning the project creates a void that is quickly filled by the concept of marriage as a private contract. Marriage is not solely about individual rights, or privacy, or equality; marriage is a set of substantive commitments that transcends easy calculations of individual self-interest, but is crucial to the perpetuation of inter- and intra-generational caregiving in our society. Recognizing its public dimension could be the start of a wonderful conversation.

Notes

1. "Governor Paterson's Remarks on the Introduction of a Marriage Equality Bill," April 16, 2009, http://www.state.ny.us/governor/keydocs/speech_0416091_print.html (last visited on Jun. 29, 2009).
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q28UwAyzUkE> (viewed and notes taken June 29, 2009).

An Evangelical Perspective

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As an evangelical Christian living in California, I had mixed feelings about the Christian community's involvement in Proposition 8. I had just started attending a new church during election time. One Sunday, I was handed a bulletin with every issue on the ballot listed and my new church's stance delineated in full. Essentially, I was given a voting guide: which politicians were God's chosen leaders, and what God wanted me to vote for on every proposition.

It took only a brief scan of the guide and an earful of the congregation's easy and enthusiastic assents to send me into a "righteous" fury. I tore the guide to pieces and spent the remainder of the service mourning the state of America's evangelical community. There was no dialogue. There was no room for prayerful consideration of the issues. I was given an order, and I was supposed to follow without question. But I *did* have questions. As

both a Christian and a political philosophy student, I have questions about what role my faith *should* play in my political involvement; “should” is an important and difficult notion for me both as a Christian *and* as a reasonable citizen.

From a Rawlsian standpoint, there are reasons to support same-sex marriage even if one believes same-sex marriage is wrong from a religious perspective. The problem of justice, as framed by Rawls,¹ arises because our project of social cooperation is between people who disagree about what constitutes a good life. We come to the table of cooperation with a pluralism of values, and this pluralism is taken as a fixed feature of our society. Though we have competing interests and different values, we share an interest in finding a reasonable way to work and live together that goes beyond a mere *modus vivendi*. The fact of pluralism precludes us from adjudicating our competing claims by appealing to any one doctrine of what is good or best, be it a metaphysical or a moral doctrine.

Our task, then, is to find some common ground on which we can structure society. Part of being a good-willed and reasonable participant in this project is recognizing that the claims made by other members of society have equal worth to our own; and in light of that recognition, we endeavor to justify our political activity in a way that is universally acceptable to those other members.

If we are all involved in a project of social cooperation under such terms, then Christians have a duty to come to the discussion of same-sex marriage in good will. They must be ready to make their arguments universally acceptable, and doing so requires that they do not appeal exclusively to their religious convictions in the justification of their position. They need not give up their religious convictions, but they cannot expect those convictions to carry weight in the public square. Religious participants have a duty to recognize that the claims of the homosexual members of society are *as worthy* as their own in our project of cooperation.

Justifying a ban on same-sex marriage, then, cannot be merely based on religious appeals to the alleged evils of homosexuality because such claims are not universally acceptable. One type of justification that is, or could be, universally acceptable is an appeal to harm. Christians could try to make a case that same-sex marriage harms either its participants or some third party. I be-

lieve Christians would be hard pressed to find a suitable paternalistic case against two consenting adults committing themselves to a long-term monogamous relationship. In fact, it is that sort of relationship that is championed by both sides of the divide, and part of the motivation for the Christian opposition to same-sex marriage is to protect this sort of relationship for heterosexual couples. Christians must, then, be able to make a convincing case that allowing same-sex marriage would cause considerable harm to the institution of marriage itself, and would therefore harm society as a whole. Such an appeal would require two forms of argument: one argument must show why the institution of marriage is valuable to society, and the other argument must convincingly show that same-sex marriage would harm this institution.

Regardless of whether one's political commitments are individualistic or communitarian in nature, it is possible to find broad agreement that there is something important about a person pursuing a life of meaning. A life of meaning for some people may involve spending their lives in a loving, committed relationship. One would be hard-pressed to make a paternalistic case against such relationships for homosexual couples while supporting such relationships for heterosexual couples. Because we typically see such relationships as valuable, it seems that, as long as those individuals are in a position to consent to such a relationship and as long as they are not harming any third parties, we ought to promote such endeavors. Marriage is a valuable institution because it promotes, or has the potential to promote, the sort of long-term and committed relationships that are conducive to many people's flourishing. Because both sides of the Proposition 8 divide agree that such relationships are valuable and worth promoting, the real question is whether marriage, as a valuable institution to society, is in danger. If Christians want to justify a stance against same-sex marriage, I believe this is where the burden of justification lies, and it is a burden I think they are unlikely to meet.

Intuitively, increasing the number of participants in the institution of marriage ought to strengthen it (or at least its appeal), especially now that cultural norms seem to be shifting away from marriage for younger generations. If there is an enemy to the institution of marriage, the prevalence of divorce is the more obvi-

ous choice. I should note here that I do not believe marriage, as it is legally and religiously understood, is the only way to promote the sort of relationship that both sides find valuable. Consequently, I am open to marriage being one form of this relationship (one male, one female) and some other institution being a sign of commitment between same-sex couples. If it is the relationship that matters, and if some alternative to “marriage” promotes this sort of relationship at least as well as (or perhaps better than) marriage, then I think that remains a viable choice (particularly if it is the more politically feasible option).

With that caveat in mind, I want to turn to the attitude of the (Protestant) evangelical community. This community, *my* community, vehemently opposes same-sex marriage. They have scripture on their side, to a point. The Old Testament warns against homosexual relations, as do parts of the New Testament—more commonly in the form of broader imperatives to remain sexually pure. If we’re honest, we must admit that such imperatives are frequently disregarded. Many Christians are quick to point out that the Bible explicitly says a man will leave his father and mother to be with a woman, that they will become one flesh (Gen. 2:23–25, New International Version). Yet as Paul reminds the Corinthians, there is a difference between holding fellow believers accountable to the law of God and holding non-believers to such a standard: “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?” (1 Cor. 5:12, NIV). How can we expect someone who does not acknowledge God’s law to live under it? How did Jesus handle God’s commands? He explained God’s commands to us, but he did not legislate them. He loved the sinner, he communed with the sinner, but he did not bring the sinner under condemnation of earthly laws.

Should the Church spend its time and resources fighting a political battle, or should it be more concerned with the battle for souls? We are called to love one another as God loves us. We understand God’s love best when we are loved by others. Promoting the committed relationship of two homosexuals may be the best way I can love and minister to them. That position doesn’t mean I’m committed to marrying them in a church under God, but it may mean that I’m committed to promoting their chance at happiness and the stability of their relationship. In doing so, I can be a light in their lives, and showing them light is the best way I can