

**HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF *MISSIO DEI*:
A RESPONSE TO TODAY'S SEXUAL CRISIS**Linda Seiler¹**INTRODUCTION**

The United States is in the midst of a cultural crisis regarding sexuality and the definition of marriage. As of the writing of this paper, more than half of the states in the Union have legalized “gay marriage,” marking the tide of a momentous cultural shift in just twenty-four months.² Even in the Church, the notion that laity and clergy alike can claim a “gay Christian” identity is gaining popularity through organizations such as the Gay Christian Network.³ Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, likens the current revolution to the theological crisis the early church faced with Gnosticism which challenged the Church’s understanding of the gospel itself.⁴ In responding to this current cultural crisis, many Christians default to what Mohler calls the “concordance reflex,”⁵ which equates to finding proof texts to debunk the mistaken notion that God condones homosexuality. However, the “concordance reflex” fails on two accounts. First, pro-gay advocates often contort the proof texts to justify homosexuality, leaving the typical layperson speechless. Second, a concordance cannot readily answer questions about “transgender,” “lesbian,” or “transvestite” issues because these words do not appear in the Bible. This dilemma does not imply Scripture is insufficient to address such issues. Rather, it indicates one’s approach to Scripture is insufficient. Instead of turning to proof texts in isolation, the Church must respond to the current crisis by looking at the Bible through the lens of a missional hermeneutic which reveals God’s ultimate purpose for sexuality. When viewing sexuality in such a context, it becomes clear that homosexuality is incongruent with God’s salvific purposes.

This paper will explain why the nature of God’s overall mission inherently disqualifies homosexuality as part of God’s design for sexuality. Part one will examine the mission of God, or *missio Dei*, as an extension of the Trinity and *imago Dei*, the image of God, as a reflection of the missional Trinity. Part two will explain the correlation between *imago Dei* and *missio Dei*, including a theology of the body and how earthly marriage foreshadows the greater spiritual reality of Christ and the Church. Part three will discuss the purpose of human sexuality in light of

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² Cable News Network Library, “Same-Sex Marriage Fast Facts.”
<http://www.cnn.com/2013/05/28/us/same-sex-marriage-fast-facts/> (Accessed October 17, 2014).

³ Michael L. Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian?: Responding with Love and Truth to Questions About Homosexuality*. (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline. 2014), 1.

⁴ Albert Mohler, “An Evangelical Theology of the Body: Biblical Theology and the Sexuality Crisis”
<http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/09/16/biblical-theology-and-the-sexuality-crisis> (Accessed Oct. 1, 2014).

⁵ Ibid. (Accessed Oct. 1, 2014).

missio Dei. Finally, part four will address the resulting implications for sexual practice and why homosexuality is inherently wrong because it fundamentally maligns *imago Dei* and is thus incongruent with *missio Dei*.

MISSIO DEI: EXTENSION OF THE TRINITY

The Latin phrase *missio Dei*, commonly referred to as “the mission of God,” originally meant, “the sending of God,” as seen through God the Father sending the Son and the Father and the Son sending the Spirit.⁶ As such, the mission of God is essentially an extension of the Trinity, rescuing humanity from the effects of sin and inviting redeemed men and women to join the divine community. “The final goal of God’s salvific activities, then, is community—human society enjoying perfect fellowship with the created world and with the Creator.”⁷

By extension, the community enjoyed among humans made in the image of God ought to reflect the nature of the God who created them. Additionally, human relationships ought to align with the overall mission of their Creator. Scripture attests to both realities, as noted in the following sections.

Imago Dei: In the Image of the Trinity

The Genesis creation account follows the predictable pattern of “Let there be...and it was so,” until the sixth day when God creates humankind. Before his crowning act, God breaks the narrative pattern with a reference to Himself, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness,” (1:26) inferring that humans stand alone as the only creation that images God Himself. However, in order to image God, the creation must reflect the unique dynamic of the Trinity in which three distinct Persons exist as one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 illustrates the paradox: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God [*elohim*, a plural word referring to God], the Lord is one [*echad*, one in essence—emphasizing unity, not just a numerical value.]”⁸ Thus, the Trinity captures the divine mystery of unity in diversity or “unity-in-difference.” As a reflection of such “unity-in-difference,” God creates uniquely gendered males and females and refers to both of them as humans. Therefore, the image of God “is not male in isolation from female, or female in isolation from male, but male and female in relationship with one another.”⁹ Hence, the image of God, or *imago Dei*, purposefully includes sexuality. As Grenz notes,

It is not without significance that in both Genesis narratives when God chooses to create what would mirror the divine being, he creates male and female. This aspect of the Genesis stories indicates that our sexuality and human sexual distinctions are

⁶Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. Kindle Edition, 2006), 703-704.

⁷Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. 1997). 49.

⁸Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible and Same Sex Attraction* (The Good Book Company. 2013), 170-174.

⁹George Wood, “Human Sexuality in the Image of God” *Enrichment Journal* 16 (2011): 31-36. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201103/201103_030_Hum_sexuality.cfm. (Accessed October 9, 2014).

somehow grounded in the divine reality and that the existence of two sexes is important for our understanding of God.¹⁰

Genesis 2:24 offers further insight as to the mystery of *imago Dei*: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” The same Hebrew word, *echad*, used to describe “unity-in-difference” in the Godhead, refers to a husband and wife becoming one, thus reflecting the divine Trinitarian mystery.¹¹ Only a heterosexual union can image such a paradox. Consequently, Scripture prohibits sexual behavior that violates the principle of “unity-in-difference.” For example, Gen. 2:20b, “But for Adam no suitable helper was found,” constitutes “an implicit rejection of bestiality,” as Adam and an animal would be too much “other.”¹² Incest is likewise prohibited as “sex with someone who is too much of a same or like.”¹³ Scripture forbids homosexuality on the same grounds since two of the same gender cannot image “unity-in-difference.”

Does God Have Gender?

While *imago Dei* includes sexuality, it does not imply that God has gender. God is Spirit; he is not male or female nor a duality of the two. All males and females find their source in God, and yet God’s essence reaches beyond gender distinctions. Unlike the ancient pagan gods who copulated with goddesses to bring forth creation, Yahweh stands alone as the sole progenitor of creation.¹⁴ Thus, God included sexuality in *imago Dei* not as a commentary on his own sexuality but as a means of revealing his character and nature in a way that humans can comprehend: “Detecting divine transcendence in human reality requires human clues... God creates, in the image of God, male and female. To describe male and female, then, is to perceive the image of God; to perceive the image of God is to glimpse the transcendence of God.”¹⁵

In order to help humans, comprehend His transcendent nature, God describes Himself with both male and female characteristics. The most obvious references of Father and Son resonate with the human concept of maleness. However, God also employs feminine imagery to reveal his character. For example, “...the Spirit of God hovered or brooded over the primeval waters (Gen. 1:2b), hatching, as it were, the egg of the world.”¹⁶ God compares Himself to a mother comforting her children (Isa. 66:13), to a hen gathering her chicks (Matt. 23:27), and to one who gives birth (James 1:18). In fact, the foundational kingdom concept of being “born again” (John 3:3) elicits the feminine imagery of a womb. Thus, God encompasses both male and female characteristics and utilizes human sexuality as a means to reveal his transcendent nature in a way understandable to humans.

¹⁰Grenz, 45.

¹¹Allbery, 170- 174.

¹²Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation." *Judaism* 40 (1991): 309

¹³Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Gays and the Bible." *Christian Century* no. 17 (2002): 41.

¹⁴Grenz, 293. (2001)

¹⁵Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1978), 21

¹⁶Grenz, 288. (2001)

Imaging God's Desire for Relationship

In addition to revealing clues about God's character and nature, human sexuality illustrates the mysterious kind of relationship God experiences in eternal triune community, which thus informs the quality of relationship he desires to experience with his creation. The mystery unravels throughout the course of the Old Testament as God compares his desire for relationship with Israel to the covenantal love between bride and groom (Jer. 2:2, Isa. 61:10). The prophets employed terms like adultery (Hosea 4:15), prostitution (Ezek. 23), and divorce (Jer. 3:8) as appropriate metaphors to Israel's breach in covenantal love.

The marital motif continues in the New Testament with even greater clarity. For instance, 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 compares the sexual union between a man and woman to their union with God: "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit." A similar comparison appears in Ephesians 5:31-32: "'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." Finally, the Book of Revelation builds on the motif of covenantal love by marking the culmination of God's redemptive mission with the marriage of the Lamb to his bride.

These passages indicate that God's design for marriage in the physical realm merely shadows a greater spiritual reality—that of Christ joined to his bride, the Church. In the same way that the bodies of a husband and wife come together in a covenantal sexual union to form a deep and intimate bond, so too God wants to know humanity in the most intimate way possible, spirit touching Spirit. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, psychologist and professor of interdisciplinary studies at Calvin College, writes about human sexuality paralleling the God-inspired drive toward intimacy:

Sexuality as part of God's image...is the human drive towards intimate communion. More than a mere physical itch that needs scratching, it urges us "to experience the other, to trust the other, and to be trusted by [that other person], to enter the other's life by entering the vital embrace of his or her body." Of course, the search toward mutual trust and self-disclosure is also present in friendships and family relationships at their best. But with the urge for sexual intercourse there comes the added dimension of passion, ecstasy and throwing-off of restraint. Thus sexual intimacy involves, at one time, the maximum degree of risk (if it goes badly) and the maximum promise of communion (if it goes well).¹⁷

Seiler expounds on Van Leeuwen's commentary:

The fact that God desires such intimate communion with His creation is not nearly as astounding as the thought that God would figuratively throw off restraint, become vulnerable with His creation, and risk total rejection. And yet that is the kind of God who rules the universe—One who invites humanity into relationship with Him in order to experience mutual trust and self-disclosure with the added dimension of throwing off all restraints in order to know and be fully known. Thus,

¹⁷Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart, *Gender & Grace: Love, Work & Parenting in a Changing World*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 213-214.

human sexuality reveals the nature of God's intimate, risk-taking, all-consuming love.¹⁸

In addition to imaging God's desire for intimate relationship, sexuality provides insight into how God will fulfill his redemptive mission: "Human sexuality, with its procreative ability, now is shown to be the means God will utilize in the establishment of a redeemed humanity. The Redeemer will be the Child of the woman."¹⁹ Part 2 expands on the significance of male and female bodies participating in *missio Dei*

MISSIO DEI AND THE HUMAN BODY

As mentioned in Part 1, God purposefully included sexuality as part of *imago Dei* to help humans comprehend his nature and to provide insights into the kind of intimate relationship God desires with those made in his image. However, the gendered human body also plays an integral role in God's plan to redeem fallen humanity and restore them to relationship with Him. Contrary to the common notion that the human body is intrinsically evil, God's plan for creation, incarnation, and resurrection all affirm the necessity of the human body—including sexuality—to accomplish his mission.²⁰

Consider first how the body plays a central role in God's plan for creation. As Mohler notes, "The body, as it turns out, is not incidental to our personhood. Adam and Eve are given the commission to multiply and subdue the earth. Their bodies allow them, by God's creation and his sovereign plan, to fulfill that task of image-bearing,"²¹ which is to fill the earth with more image bearers. Only a heterosexual union can fulfill the creation mandate.

The body plays a central role in the Fall as well. One need not venture beyond the book of Genesis to see its effects. Following Adam and Eve's initial marriage covenant blessed by God, the remainder of Genesis describes the use of the body in sexual aberrations ranging from homosexuality in Sodom (Gen. 19), to incest between Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19), to the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34). Thus, the Fall corrupted all human relationships and produced a distorted view of sexuality.

The incarnation and redemptive work of the cross also involve the body. As Mohler writes, "...we must note that one of the most important aspects of our redemption is that it came by way of a Savior with a *body*. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14; cf. Phil. 2:5-11). Human redemption is accomplished by the Son of God *incarnate*—who remains incarnate eternally."²² Thus, the body is indispensable to God's plan of salvation.

¹⁸Linda Seiler, "Compassion without Compromise: A Christian Response to Homosexuality." *Master's Thesis, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary*. (2014), 3.

¹⁹Grenz, 59. (1997).

²⁰Mark A. Yarhouse, "Homosexuality, Ethics and Identity Synthesis." *Christian Bioethics: Non-ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 10, no. 2/3 (2004): 248.

²¹Mohler. (Accessed Oct. 1, 2014).

²²Ibid. (Accessed Oct. 1, 2014).

Finally, God’s plan for the resurrection and restoration of all things also incorporates the body. The redeemed will inhabit glorified bodies for eternity just as the Son of God lives eternally in a glorified body. Yet, some have hypothesized that Jesus’ reference to believers no longer marrying in heaven because they will be like the angels (Matt. 22:30) infers that the redeemed will have genderless bodies. Grenz criticizes that hypothesis based on the fact that Jesus’ glorified body retained a definitive gender:

If in the paradigm of the eschatological resurrection the external maleness of the Risen Jesus is preserved (albeit only as it is transformed) so that he remains physically recognizable, then how much more are the deeper characteristics of maleness/femaleness preserved (yet again only transformed) in the glorified state entered through the general resurrection at the consummation of history.²³

Additionally, Mohler indicates that while gender remains, sexual activity will cease since earthly marriage and reproduction are merely a shadow of a greater spiritual reality finally fulfilled:

In terms of our sexuality, while gender will remain in the new creation, sexual activity will not. It is not that sex is nullified in the resurrection; rather, it is fulfilled. The eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb, to which marriage and sexuality point, will finally arrive. No longer will there be any need to fill the earth with image-bearers as was the case in Genesis 1. Instead, the earth will be filled with knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.²⁴

Thus, sexual relations on earth serve to image the love relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church, which will ultimately find fulfillment at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-10). Even after God fulfills his mission, humans will retain their sexuality for all of eternity.

However, there exists an additional spiritual parallel: In the same way the heterosexual union images “unity-in-difference” and produces physical offspring as a result of that intimacy, spiritual offspring result from spiritual intimacy with Christ. First Corinthians 6:16-17 indicates that the believer who is united with the Lord is united with him in spirit, imaging “unity-in-difference.” The end result of such a union should eventually produce spiritual offspring in the form of sons and daughters in the faith. For this reason, Jesus commanded his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations” and to “teach them” everything Jesus taught them the same way a parent would train a child toward maturity (Matt. 28:19).

The New Testament furthers the analogy of spiritual children by referring to new believers as “infants in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1, Heb. 5:12) and “newborn babes” who must “grow up in [their] salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2). Additionally, the apostle Paul says to his disciples, “I became your father through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15), and he compares the discipleship process to a mother nurturing her child: “Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you” (1 Thess. 2:7b-8a). In fact, Paul extends the analogy to childbirth: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” (Gal. 4:19). Hence, the New Testament illustrates a parallel between the intimacy of a human marriage that produces offspring that need parenting and the believer developing intimacy with Christ, which produces

²³Grenz, 26. (1997).

²⁴Mohler. (Accessed Oct. 1, 2014).

spiritual children that must be disciplined. However, when this age comes to a close, and Christ finally unites with his bride, the need for spiritual birthing and parenting will cease, for every believer will know Christ as they are fully known (1 Cor. 13:12), the final judgment will occur, and the need to win others to Christ and make disciples will no longer exist. In this way, both earthly marriage and spiritual birth/parenting foreshadow the fulfillment of *missio Dei* as Christ unites with his bride, after which the need for earthly marriage and spiritual birth/parenting will cease because the penultimate will have come. However, until that time, the human body—including human sexuality—serves as a shadow of the penultimate yet to come

THE PURPOSE OF SEXUALITY

While human sexuality foreshadows the greater spiritual reality of Christ marrying his bride, God's purpose for creating sexuality transcends the physical body. Yet, that does not mean sexuality can be divorced from the body as pro-gay advocates assert. In 2011, the American Psychological Association (APA) published "Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients" which makes distinctions between sex, gender, and sexual orientation. The guidelines define "sex" as "a person's biological status ... typically categorized as male, female," not to be confused with "gender" defined as "the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex." "Sexual orientation" "refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted."²⁵ Thus, according to the APA, one's biological sex could differ from one's gender or sexual orientation.

However, the Bible does not distinguish between sex, gender, and sexual orientation. In fact, the Scriptures never mention sexual orientation because it is presumed that heterosexuality is God's normative design for sexuality—anything outside of that constitutes an aberration. Consequently, to claim an orientation toward homosexuality would be akin to claiming an orientation toward lying, murder, incest, greed, or any other sinful behavior incongruent with God's design for humanity. As such, God designed one's biological sex (male or female) to align with one's gender (masculine or feminine) and their sexual attractions to fixate on the opposite sex. If an individual's sex, gender, and sexual attractions do not align with God's design, that indicates a deeper psychological/emotional issue for which the individual needs healing. Part 4 will address such dynamics in more detail.

What Is Sexuality?

While the body plays an indispensable role in *missio Dei*—and sexuality cannot be divorced from the body—human sexuality involves more than mere bodily functions or sexual attractions. God's purpose for sexuality, how it manifests among those whose bodies lack sexual function, and the difference between human sexuality and animal sexuality demonstrate this reality.

As previously noted, God reveals Himself through human sexuality: "Sex is his self-disclosing picture window into the Almighty—His grand metaphor to teach the value he places on intimate relationships. God is love and sexuality gives us ways to understand this."²⁶ As such,

²⁵American Psychological Association, "Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients." <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/guidelines.aspx#>. (Accessed October 11, 2014).

²⁶Douglas E. Rosenau, and Michael R. Sytsma, "A Theology of Sexual Intimacy: Insights into the Creator." *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 23, no. 3 (2004): 263.

sexuality equates to more than a bodily function. Grenz contends that sexuality equates to a drive toward bonding, a quest for completion:

At the heart of human sexuality is embodiment, which includes the sexed body that marks a person as male or female and out of which other aspects of human existence emerge. Bound up with embodiment is the sense of incompleteness, coupled with the drive for completeness, that together lead to bonding. Sexuality, therefore, is the dynamic that draws human beings out of their individual isolation into relationships with others.²⁷

Since the end goal of *missio Dei* consists of welcoming redeemed humanity into the Trinitarian community, sexuality, as Grenz defines it, plays an integral role in pulling humans out of isolation and into community with one another and with God. Hence, God purposes that sexuality lead toward relational bonding.

Second, the reality that sexuality involves more than physical sexual acts is evidenced by the fact that the drive toward relational bonding remains present in individuals whose body lack the capacity for sexual functioning.²⁸ For example, toddlers are sexual beings who seek completion in relationships despite the fact that they are incapable of sexual reproduction. The same holds true for the elderly whose reproductive capacity has ceased. Likewise, persons who for other reasons are incapable of sexual activity still remain gendered beings who long for connection in relationship, indicating sexuality involves more than the physical body alone.

Third, pro-gay advocates often cite examples of homosexual activity among animals to justify the same behavior in humans. However, human sexuality with its inherent drive toward bonding operates on an entirely different level than animal sexuality, as Bible expositor Grant Richison notes:

The sexuality of man is not identical to the sexuality of an animal. Man operates both in bodily function and with his person. God made man's personhood in his own image attendant with norms and standards. Animal operates in one dimension and man operates in two. A man operating in the single dimension of biology is a man devoid of God. Man operating within two dimensions needs to coronate those two dimensions under God; otherwise, he develops pathological sexual orientation.²⁹

Hence, sexual activity that focuses on the body divorced from relationship violates God's design that involves body, soul, and spirit in the drive toward bonding. For instance, the "one flesh" union described in Genesis 2:24 refers to sexuality as more than the sexual act in marriage as evidenced by the fact that God created Eve in response to Adam's relational loneliness, "It is not good for the man to be alone. ... But for Adam no suitable helper was found"

²⁷Grenz, 301. (2001)

²⁸Ibid., 17. (1997)

²⁹Grant Richison, "Theology of Sex." <http://versebyversecommentary.com/articles/theology-of-sex/> (Accessed October 9, 2014).

Aqw2 (Gen. 2:18, 20b). The Genesis account does not mention procreation in association with the “one flesh” union, thus making the emphasis solidarity rather than sexual function.¹ Likewise, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 alludes to sexuality involving the entirety of one’s temple, which is a body that houses the soul and the spirit. Consequently, to involve oneself with a prostitute and view sexuality as merely a physical function divorced from relational bonding equates to sinning against one’s own body, soul, and spirit—not to mention sinning against the Spirit of God which indwells the believer. Lisa Cahill, distinguished professor of theology and ethics at Boston College articulates the essence of viewing sexuality as merely a physical phenomenon:

Yet to void sex of all but ‘bodies and pleasures’...is...to identify the experiential unit too minimalistically, to cut off too quickly a complex and *intrinsically relational* dimension of human being. It is only when the reading of experience is individualistic—even adolescent—that the discovery of ‘sex’ is the discovery of sexual pleasure.”²

Thus, minimizing sexuality to the sheer enjoyment of physical pleasure equates to a juvenile, individualistic mindset that falls short of God’s intention for sexuality, which he designed as the drive toward relational bonding that manifests among humans and foreshadows the greater spiritual reality of Christ and the Church.

Masculine and Feminine Relating

In response to the current sexual crisis in the U.S., Larry Crabb, noted Christian psychologist and author, penned the book *Fully Alive: A Biblical View of Gender that Frees Men and Women to Live Beyond Stereotypes* in which he posits that sexuality goes beyond the physical body and affects the way men and women relate differently. In other words, Crabb contends that God designed men to relate in a decidedly masculine way and women to relate in a decidedly feminine way. At first glance, Crabb’s assertions appear to reinforce cultural stereotypes, which have no biblical basis. As Gagnon notes, men are masculine “by virtue of their sex, not by virtue of possessing a social construct of masculinity that may or may not reflect true masculinity.”³ The converse applies to women whose sex makes them feminine regardless of whether they adhere to social constructs of femininity. However, upon further examination, Crabb’s assertions align with Gagnon’s definition, which bases masculinity/femininity solely on sex apart from cultural constructs. Crabb grounds his assertions upon the etymology of the original Hebrew words for male and female in the creation account. Gwen Sayler, professor of Hebrew at Wartburg Seminary, confirms Crabb’s conclusion regarding the meaning of “male” and “female” in Genesis 1:

¹Grenz, 278. (2001).

²Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics, New Studies in Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 110-111.

³Robert A. J Gagnon, "Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity." *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 24 no. 4 (2005), 300.

Like their near-eastern and Greek counterparts, the priestly authors assume that penetration is the essence of sexual intercourse. Men are penetrating agents. Women are penetrated recipients of male activity. The centrality of these male/female categories for priestly anthropology is evident in the terms used to describe the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:27: “So God created humanity (adam) in God’s image: male (*zakar*) and female (*neqbah*) God created them.” The Hebrew word *zakar* also means “memory.” The male is the one through whom memory passes; he is the active memory-making agent. The Hebrew word *neqbah* means “hole, orifice bearer.” The female is the one whose hole is penetrated by the memory maker. She is the passive recipient, subordinate to the active male. From the priestly perspective, these distinctions—what we would term gender role categories—are imbedded in creation itself.⁴

Sayler, like Crabb, deduces that masculinity and femininity are embedded in human beings by virtue of their sex. However, Sayler arrives at a different conclusion than Crabb, arguing that the distinctions between men and women no longer apply under the new covenant, making homosexual practice acceptable for the Christian. Crabb, on the other hand, argues that gender distinctions remain a foundational part of humanity: “Femininity or masculinity is so irrevocably and irreversibly embedded in our being that no one can accurately say, “I am first a person and then male or female.”⁵ “We are not only image-bearing persons,”⁶ contends Crabb, “we are gendered image-bearing persons.”⁷ Gender is so deeply embedded in human beings that it affects the way men and women relate to others in uniquely different ways. Crabb pulls from Grenz’s writings on the Trinitarian mission to reconcile humans and invite them into divine community and posits the question, “Did God create us as image-bearing males and females so that men and women could each reveal, by the way we relate, something of the wonder of how the persons of the Trinity relate?”⁸

The remainder of Crabb’s book expands on the notion that God designed men as “memory makers” to move toward women—not just sexually but relationally—as a reflection God’s initiative to move toward lost humanity to reconcile them to Himself. Likewise, Crabb writes, God created women as ones who welcome movement toward them—not just in a sexual way but relationally—as a reflection of God who warmly welcomes redeemed humans to join in the divine community. Crabb’s assertions offer thought-provoking insights into the relational differences between men and women, supporting the conclusion that sexuality permeates humanity beyond the physical into the relational realm.

⁴Gwen B. Sayler, "Beyond the Biblical Impasse: Homosexuality Through the Lens of Theological Anthropology." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44, no. 1(2005): 82.

⁵Larry Crabb, *Fully Alive: A Biblical Vision of Gender that Frees Men and Women to Live Beyond Stereotypes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 21.

⁶Crabb, 27.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Crabb, 28.

Marriage and Singleness as Images of God's Love

In addition to the relational uniqueness between males and females, the way sexuality manifests in relationships among both married and single people uniquely images the love of God. As Grenz notes, “In a sense, our sexuality pervades all our relationships. We constantly relate to others as male or female. And our relationships to persons of the same-sex differ from our relationships to the opposite sex.”⁹ For example, a marriage relationship images God’s desire to form a community based on “exclusive love and fidelity to covenant,”¹⁰ paralleling God’s desire for bride that relates exclusively to her Bridegroom on the basis of blood covenant. However, God’s design for the human marital covenant to produce offspring, creating the potential to open their relationship to others beyond themselves, reflects God’s willingness to open his exclusive relationship and invite more disciples (i.e. spiritual offspring) to join in exclusive relationship with him. In contrast to the exclusivity of the marital covenant, singleness manifests God’s all-inclusive love: “The less formal bonding of singles reflects the openness of the divine love to the continual expansion of the circle of love to include within its circle those yet outside its boundaries. In short, the single life can express the divine reality as characterized by a love that seeks relationship (community) not exclusively.”¹¹ In short, the nature of relationships among singles reflects God’s desire to welcome “whosoever will” into the divine community.

In these ways, sexuality goes beyond the physical sex act and pervades the very nature of relationships between men and women—whether married or single—as a reflection of God’s penultimate love reflected in *missio Dei*. Grenz aptly articulates God’s end goal: “Sexuality is the sense of incompleteness together with the quest for wholeness that provides the impulse—the drive toward bonding. This impulse leads ultimately to the eschatological community that constitutes the new humanity in fulfillment of God’s intentions from the beginning.”¹²

IMPLICATIONS FOR SEXUAL PRACTICE

God’s design for sexuality to image the Trinity and point to the greater spiritual reality of the union of Christ and the Church has direct implications on sexual practice. As Angus Hunter notes in his book, *From Venus to Mars and Back*, God did not create sexuality with morality (i.e. rules to follow) in mind; he created sexuality to image the relational mystery of the trinity, with the ultimate goal that redeemed humans would be vessels of God’s divine presence. Only the heterosexual marriage covenant images God’s ultimate goal of relationship with his creation.¹³ In contrast, homosexual behavior does not align with *missio Dei* because a same-sex union cannot image “unity-in-difference” and therefore cannot parallel the concept of spiritual birth and parenting in the kingdom, nor can it image the ultimate fulfillment of the marriage of the Lamb.

⁹Grenz, 22, (1997).

¹⁰Ibid., 195, (1997).

¹¹Grenz, 195, (1997).

¹²Ibid., 283, (2001).

¹³Angus N. Hunter, *From Venus to Mars and Back: What It Means to Be You* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Pub., 2009), 91.

Additionally, the notion that one can identify as a “gay Christian” conflicts with God’s purpose for sexuality. As previously mentioned, one cannot divorce the body from sexuality nor can the soul and spirit be divorced from the body. Thus, if a person finds that his or her biological sex, gender identity, and sexual attractions do not align with God’s intended design, it indicates the presence of emotional deficits in the soul which have affected normal psychological and sexual development. Psychologist Elizabeth Moberly explains how same-sex attractions result from emotional deficits that become sexualized:

In the homosexual condition, psychological needs that are essentially pre-adult remain in a person who is in other respects adult. Homosexual activity implies the eroticization of deficits in growth that remain outstanding, and this is, fundamentally, a confusion of the emotional needs of the non-adult with the physiological desires of the adults.¹⁴

At its root, homosexuality equates to an emotional need that manifests in a sexual way. The solution, therefore, is not to embrace a gay identity—even if one insists on practicing celibacy as a “gay Christian”—but rather to seek to resolve the emotional deficits that precipitate same-sex attractions. Thus, rather than encouraging believers to identify as “gay Christians,” the Church ought to grow in its expertise to address the emotional deficits which contribute to homoerotic desires.¹⁵

The current sexual crisis can be traced to the root of viewing sexuality as merely a physical function of the body apart from the dynamic of relational bonding and the drive toward completion. As Grenz notes, “Disengaged from relationship and consequence, sex has become a freestanding activity engaged in solely for the purpose of pleasure.”¹⁶ Consequently, marriage no longer exists as a “public institution for the common good” but rather serves as “a private arrangement for the satisfaction of the individuals.”¹⁷ Such a view contradicts God’s greater purpose for sexuality as the drive toward bonding which pulls individuals out of isolation into relationship with one another and, ultimately, into relationship with their Creator. Justification for homosexuality stems from the same root: “homoerotic desire is sexual narcissism”¹⁸ (Gagnon 2005, 300) which discounts God’s greater purpose for sexuality in the context of *missio Dei*. A homosexual union cannot produce more image bearers, cannot image “unity-in-difference,” and cannot foreshadow the ultimate relationship between Christ and his bride. Therefore, the Scriptures forbid homosexual practice not simply as a religious rule but because homosexuality maligns *imago Dei* and does not align with *missio Dei*.

¹⁴Elizabeth R. Moberly, *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic* (Guernsey, Channel Islands: The Guernsey Press, 2001), 20.

¹⁵For an in depth analysis, see Seiler’s master’s thesis “Compassion without Compromise: A Christian Response to Homosexuality” (2014, AGTS) which addresses emotional deficits that contribute to same-sex attractions and discusses how the Church can help those who struggle with homoerotic desires.

¹⁶Grenz, 10, (1997).

¹⁷Timothy J. Keller, and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 21.

¹⁸Gagnon, 300, (2005).

CONCLUSION

The Church must rise to the challenge to respond to the current sexual crisis with sound theology. Rather than defaulting to the “concordance reflex,” which pro-gay advocates can divert with crafty contortions of Scripture, Christians must address homosexuality in the context of a missional hermeneutic by explaining how homosexual practice maligns *imago Dei*, which God purposed to image the Trinitarian mystery of “unity-in-difference” and reveal the transcendent nature of God in gendered imagery understandable to humans. In addition to maligning *imago Dei*, homosexual practice proves incongruent with *missio Dei*, as a homosexual union cannot produce offspring and therefore fails to image spiritual birth/parenting and cannot foreshadow the ultimate reality of “unity-in-difference” fulfilled by Christ and the Church. Additionally, homoerotic desire equates to sexual narcissism, which minimizes sexual behavior to a means of meeting one’s personal needs rather than submitting to God’s design for sexuality, imaging his love in all aspects of relationship whether married or single, and participating in *missio Dei*. Thus, to categorize homosexual practice as sin and embrace God’s heterosexual design for *imago Dei* in the overall context of *missio Dei* constitutes worship in its deepest sense.

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