

The Christian Community

# Perspectives



# Marriage

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# Perspectives

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Thrown into solitary being, we yearn for connection. Our task is to discover how we can join with each other without losing our separateness. Our emancipation from forms of relating sanctioned and imposed by outer authority brings the challenge consciously to discover what human relating can mean. For this reason we turn in this issue of *Perspectives* to some of the questions around marriage and sexuality. As is always the case, each contributor is the authority for what he or she writes. We hope that the variety of viewpoints represented here will help our readers to find their own standpoint in these complicated and crucial questions of our time.

TOM RAVETZ



*The Night of Scheherazade*, Marc Chagall

# Archetypes of Man and Marriage.

Roger Druitt

## Origins

Marriage comes at the end of a fairy tale, where prince and princess are united for ever in harmony, fruitfulness and the good of the world. But here, outside the fairy tale, marriage is hard work, transforming the state of a heavenly feeling of being in love into practical team work, adaptation, giving and receiving and sacrifice in order to bring it down to earth. The fairy tale calls this 'they lived happily ever after'.

So what are we trying to describe here under the heading of archetype? And is something apparently diverging from the archetype a *variation* of it or *departure from* it?

In the Bible, Man is created in the image of God—male-female. So God is an archetype of Man, who, despite being apparently a man, is male-female. Later these become separated, then there occurs the Fall.

In the Aboriginal Dreamtime, the creation of Mankind is also in two stages, first the male, then the female. This has its own logic if you consider that creation is a downward gesture, from spirit to earth; so the male, who goes deeper down, arrives first, whilst the female comes later and he has to be her link to the earthly realm of sense perception, until she 'arrives' properly and can become independent of him. This part is preceded, however, by a narrative not found in the Bible regarding the gender of the creator spirits. The actual creator of the world is the feminine Sun Goddess. She is already dormant in the earth, reflecting the insight elaborated in *Occult Science* that the Earth came out of a cosmic sleep containing Sun and Moon within her together with the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms in germinal form, with a human element 'implied' in the animal. A male deity calls her awake to quicken these germs and to do so she, who is *in* the earth, speeds down *upon* it from the periphery; but later it is she who creates him! You can see we are in a realm beyond that of logic, as one might suppose for cosmic events.

Subsequently, there is confusion amongst the animal-humans, followed by the creation of man proper. This Father-god then

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decided to place part of his intelligence into creation, into all the animals, but they could not cope with it; strife ensued and a fall took place. Man had then to be created uniquely, to contain this 'Intelligence' properly and what had hitherto been man-animal separated into two distinct kingdoms. Later, woman was created out of the heart of a plant in its full vitality. The man had to lead her gently into the sense world. Thus, right from the start, the male-female complex is inherent in both the divine creation and the human image of it.

These narratives show that in creation there was a male-female dynamic at work both in the creator(s), God and the creature, 'Man'; and that the link between them is expressed in the word 'intelligence' in the case of the native Australian tradition or the 'divine breath' in the case of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, this is enhanced to 'logos', the Word that contains both meaning and creative energy.

In St. John's Gospel, creation is through the Word and this is closely followed by the first 'sign', the enhancement of water into wine through the co-working of Jesus and the Mother. The setting for this sign is a *marriage*. We can see a creative marriage between the logos-made-flesh and the 'Mother' and between, presumably, the bridegroom and the bride (although she is not mentioned). At the other end of Creation the New Jerusalem appears, adorned as a *bride*. 'The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come' ... Come, Lord Jesus.' This male-female element, therefore, is active at the beginning of creation, at the beginning of Christ's ministry and at the transition from this Earth evolution to that which is to follow. It is part of the archetype of the human being.

### **'In the Image'**

The creator in Genesis is the union of the Elohim, the seven creator spirits acting in concert to create the seven-fold Man: physical body, vital or etheric body, soul or astral body and ego, which then articulates within it the 'higher members' of manas or spirit-self, budhi or life-spirit and atman or spirit man. The focal point of this creation is the Jahve-Ego: I am I, who was and is and is to come, the principle brought to man by Jesus Christ, 'fear not: I am I', (John 6). In our Earth evolution, our Ego is the central pivot of our being and hence of this evolution itself.

This 'creation in the image' is embedded in a greater one, the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, the archetype of the human being in Body, Soul and Spirit. Now, Body comprises from the previous image the physical, vital and soul bodies; Soul comprises the earthly ego and its functions in the soul



*Nude before the window, Marc Chagall*

of Thinking, Feeling and Willing, whilst Spirit comprises the higher ego as it transforms the bodily members into the three higher spiritual members within it. As we then walk about on this earth, our human soul—that loves or does not love and can think and feel about it and sometimes do something about it—is open above to the divine archetype and below to the nature of earth. Nowadays it is a common insight that this male-female polarity also works in the soul. The fundamental soul gesture of sympathy and antipathy manifests in this female-male archetype. It is nothing to do with gender. In our human creativity too we tap into the cosmic creativity of the divine male-female partnership. This is not ‘gender’ either; that only comes into play when we dip down into our bodily part: astral body, life or etheric body and physical body. All three are polarised into male and female but in different ways. These ways may also be in mutual harmony or not; and that is where we can refer, when we are trying to find our way through a life that is ‘endowed’ with our own particular constitution, to the archetypal polarity and yet pair of male and female, *in the context of creation*. Let us hold this distinction between creation and constitution

and suggest for now that whatever our constitution, if we are to be truly creative we need to access the male-female dynamic within us.

'In the image' of the divine archetype would then mean that the male and female qualities come together to produce a third as a new creation. This can happen within any individual of whatever sex or orientation, and any couple, as long as the male-female polarity is the creative factor.

Now let us consider two features of mythology where homosexuality appears.

Plato tells that man was created originally in three genders, male, female and hermaphrodite. The division of the sexes resulted in homosexual male, homosexual female and heterosexual males and females, all of whom have the inherent homing urge towards their erstwhile 'other half'. If we consider this as a description of states of *soul*, we find the two extreme forms of our nature and the balanced one in the middle. It is the image of the archetype with its two divergences.

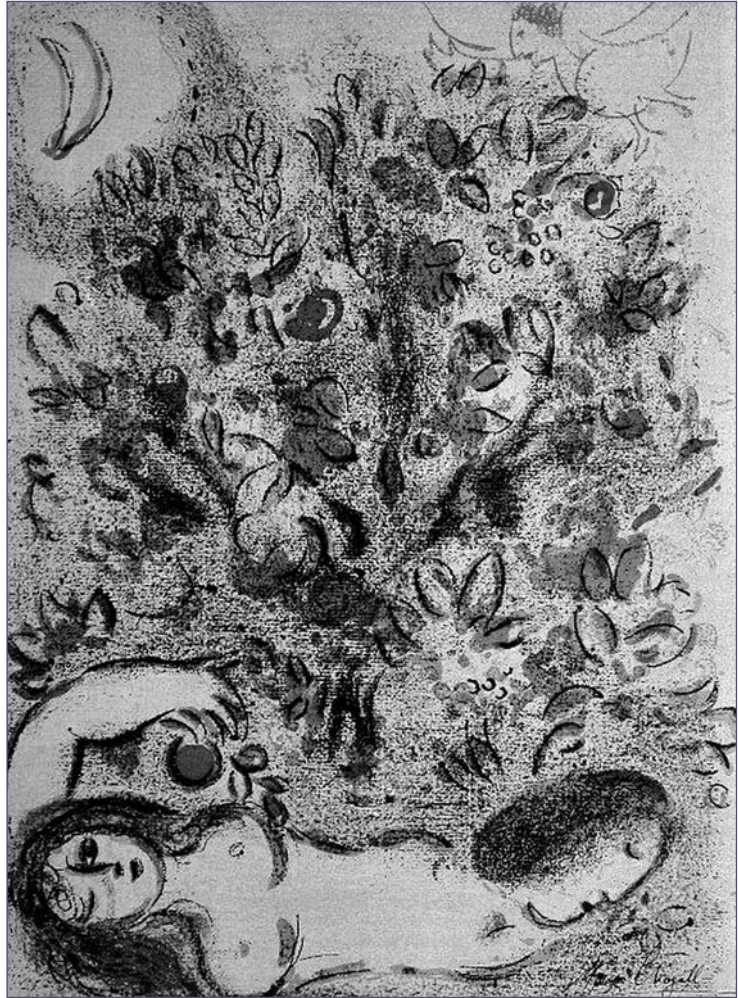
Then there is the Egyptian story of one of the many battles between Horus and Set. Horus is the god of order and Set that of disorder. Both Horus and Set have consorts. They are to a certain degree creator gods who then walk amongst men in primeval times. You can trace the dynamic equilibrium between these powers throughout Egyptian history, depicted in the pharaohs' names. Order is thrown into chaos until a pharaoh arises who can balance Horus and Set in his own soul. Those pharaohs who did this became the inaugurators of each new Kingdom, of which there were three major ones. Set makes a homosexual attack on Horus to weaken his power but Horus outsmarts him. The point is not that Set is homosexual and therefore evil: he chooses that as a form of attack, of bringing *disorder*. Homosexuality exists amongst these gods and is part of the archetype, as in Plato. Its application, however, is in a specific situation and should not be considered as a precedent. When balance is re-established, evolution can move forward creatively again.

### **What is an archetype?**

As we try to act freely, we distinguish between *natural* and *moral* action. To be human is to exist in both spheres.

In nature, we may study, let us say, a particular plant. We look at its leaves and flowers, its way of arranging them on the stem and so forth. We build up a picture of it. Then we find, amongst many other plants, a similar one. We notice that the leaves are similar but perhaps more rounded or more pointed. After studying many such 'similar' plants, we can distinguish





*Paradis*, Marc Chagall

which belong to the *same* species and which to a *different* one and conclude that each species can manifest in infinite variability yet within certain limits. We can speak of the archetype, of that species; and we can further speak of an archetypal plant that clearly delineates plant from mineral and plant from animal.

Similarly, there is an archetypal mineral and an archetypal animal—each of a markedly different ‘nature’.

The archetypal mineral is of Form; that of the plant is of Form and Life, whereby the life principle dissolves the physical form and asserts a living, or etheric, form. The animal archetype adds Movement, a *soul* gesture that now transforms both physical and life forms with soul. So, for example,

the spine of different animals supports the kind of movements that that animal needs to make in order to assert its 'nature' in movement. A plant stem is similar; yet the spine and the stem, although they have the same function, are very different organs, both in chemical structure and in form and metamorphosis.

As the different animal forms reveal soul qualities, one can say that the archetypal animal is really the soul of man, in its steps towards the state of ego-bearer. If we fail to continue this moral development, we shall bring into creation another kind of animal that does not yet exist, described in the Apocalypse as 'beast'. So while the archetype of 'animal' is like a 'Son of Man', from whom the various animal forms derive as metamorphoses, the archetype of the human realm, with its biographical diversity, must be something that is still higher than man. We can speak here, in all scientific reverence, of the Holy Spirit, whose working towards us, however, must be and is in the realm of *freedom*, otherwise Man would not be the kingdom higher than the Animal that he must be. We do have a kind of cosmic permission to disobey our angel, our mediator to the Holy Spirit, even if that is not usually advisable. We have the option to rebel against the whole order of Humanity, often with dire consequences. The rather drastic story of Ananias and Sapphira in the Acts of the Apostles reveals this, when read rightly. We see in the story of the conception of Jesus through Joseph (Matthew 1) the reassurance given that it will be no less than this great archetype who has worked through Joseph as the conceiver, rather than just himself as private person or even as representative of the Jewish race.

Considering ourselves now, we do sometimes feel restricted by an archetype. For example we do not have thumbs on both sides of the hand, however useful this would be for certain tasks. It is of course not impossible for this to occur, but we acknowledge it as non-typical. From a purely genetic point of view we would have to say that as it *can* happen it is therefore not atypical; but once we have grasped the place of the thumb in the wider context of the whole body and our use of it, it is an *aberration*. What distinguishes a *variation* from an aberration is the greater picture. In the context of human partnerships this can be a relevant factor. A heterosexual couple is not immune from aberrant conduct.

On the other hand, if we are held up at red lights with a fire engine flashing behind us, we would feel free to jump the light for the sake of someone's need. We have that capacity. We know which occasions can call us to act outside the norm and those in which we cannot but be 'conventional', even

if we may despise ourselves for it. The human being is intrinsically creative and really only happy when so being. This may well happen within the 'norms' of convention; then it is a free re-creation of them rather than conformity to them. But it may also be an extending of boundaries, such as in composition in music of other forms of art. A break in convention is better acknowledged and accepted from one who has proved themselves already a master of it. This gives the conviction that the breakthrough is guided by a real creative force and not just licence.

Where can one point to an archetype here? It can only be within the ego of the creative human being, whom we therefore see as having no bounds. The *images* of these (many) archetypes are the many human actions that are spread abroad on this good earth.

So the human *archetype* is the creative deed of the invisible man within us and the *image* the generic recognition of it, which already blurs its originality, whilst in Nature it is the other way round. The images are around us, the archetypes hidden in the spirit from our earthly gaze.

We shall see our further evolution in respect of 'archetype' in what follows.

## **Sacraments as Archetypes in Life**

Each sacrament depicts the relationship between one or more human beings and the communities of earthly and spiritual worlds in which they are embedded. So, for example, the Baptism depicts the transition of the *soul* from Spirit to Earth and its reception into earthly Christendom with the leadership of its godparents. The child receives the substance of resurrection into its *body*; and its *spirit* is consecrated through its name for its earthly destiny tasks. It is a complete and *ideal* picture, a perfect archetype of human life. All the sacraments do this in their own way. But these pictures are not immediately perfected in the lives of the human beings who receive them. They work as leaven for the future. The mere baptismal formula will not save the soul if no further trouble is taken—sacraments are not magic but a foundation and force for personal striving towards the goal. Each sacrament works out of the destiny of the past (Father), connects us with the Risen Christ (Son) as guide and comforter and leads us forward through the power of the Holy Spirit into a future where all human beings, in all their biographical diversity, can be in accord. This is the full working of archetype in the human realm (Kingdom of Heaven): it is a creative activity out of the male-female polarity inherent in the Godhead, yet within the wide possibilities of humanness.

## The Archetype in Marriage

The *raison d'être* of marriage is to place a new being into the world that will be part of the world's evolving, and bless it. It is carried out under the rubric of rebuilding the earthly ingredients of the relationship into spiritual ones. Here we clearly see marriage as a stage for that creative activity described under archetypes above, that in the human realm, individuals create the archetype rather than follow it. But the latter needs to happen first: the archetype of man in the spirit is to ray down to the couple (through the sacrament) to work as leaven in their relationship to create on earth an image of the risen human being, a partnership between male and female.

The divine male-female is thus brought into the human sphere by the Risen Christ, who in his risen nature has not only mended our fallen nature but recombined the sexes into the human being of the future. A forerunner of this appears in the way modern people try to balance their gender qualities in life and soul. In the Risen Christ this goes as far as the body. The first part of the service seals the earthly relationships. The second engages the archetype: before the picture of the Risen Christ, the couple is led into his realm as light giver in which the man and woman will have their polarity consecrated within the new union. The spirit-will of the man in the opening section becomes a capacity in the *woman* and the soul-spirit of the woman becomes an organ in the *man* for perceiving the complete soul-spiritual landscape in which the woman lives. Finally we see the blessing of the new archetype-to-be-created. Human beings manifest not only in all shapes and sizes, all dispositions and mind-sets but in all shades or colours of gender, including within the natures of 'man' and 'woman' named in the sacrament. By establishing equal status in the Word at the beginning, then proceeding to develop the polarity in the further steps, the spectrum of humanity is given a working centre (in the light) within opposites.

The archetypal human being holds within himself the whole spectrum from male to female attributes. The resurrection body differs from the mortal body in that it has no bounding physical gender. So, in human relationships, we are dealing with the coming together of earthly human beings biased by gender as an archetype that embraces those opposites. These opposites are needed in the physical realm in order for the sacraments to be applicable. Of course, Christ may work in any relationship regardless of gender; and same-sex relationships, whether friendships or partnerships, may be fulfilled in this. It would be misleading, however,

try to apply the marriage sacrament to balance them, for they stand in a different juxtaposition between nature and spirit.

If a married couple is not to have children, the divine archetype will still seek its creative expression through the male-female divine image working out into something essentially human, begetting the human being of the future, the one that can bestow happiness and a good destiny on themselves and the world. The marriage is an enterprise to do creative work for the world. Marriage should only be sought when there is a will to serve the common good and when a creativity is present that follows the divine archetype into creation. This is its main task.

### **Shine and Follow**

I was once in a committee with three highly intelligent women. Critical issues had to be assessed. I discovered that the best way was to start passively and just listen to what was being said. It took a little while to learn this. It was like going for a stroll through a landscape, where the one or the other would point out this or that. It was not really what I would have called a discussion but I could see that it was important. After a while the travellers would show a sign of having arrived somewhere; and at that point I could come in and say, 'It seems to me that you are thinking this' and this usually met with agreement and we would move on.

*Following* was only possible when a clear *picture* had been given. First this was the wording on the agenda; but that shone no light. The substance of that following was then cast into form by the male mind and the true following ensued. Everyone felt a good job had been done.

In the case of marriage, one may therefore say: for the woman to follow there must be something illuminating placed before her; and this needs to be charged with life, not abstraction. How can a woman get a man to do that? A real marital question! Part of it is to let him know what she would like and there are various ways of doing that, helped by his interest. However, all this, within the context of the marriage ritual, must take place under the light of the Resurrection. Can what the woman wants and what the man wants stand upright in this light? That is the question! Are their wants in harmony with the progress of the world? But then the woman is really following Christ as he is able to work through the man and the man is overcoming his native self-need to go the world-path and so shine before the woman. There is no denying the fact that a woman ready to follow a *good* light makes the kindling of that light more accessible for the man who cares.

## Consideration of the New Jerusalem as this archetype in its completion

The marriage is under the auspices of Christ's sacrifice to take work of earth into the spirit. This is a form of Transubstantiation, in which nature and human action are carried over into the spirit in order to be imbued with the resurrection body. That is the principle of developing a 'New Heaven and a New Earth' (Rev 21) already now within the present heaven and earth.

At the end of the Bible stands the vision of the New Jerusalem as a Bride. At the Marriage at Cana we had to imagine the bride: now she is depicted in her full glory as the future archetypal human being. But where is the Bridegroom? A clue is in Matthew 25 where Maidens await the Bridegroom, who there is clearly the Christ. So the future of humanity lies in a dynamic relationship of the human community to the Christ into which people may walk freely.

As we saw, the archetype of the mineral kingdom, of the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom governs, in each case, the form of the being whose archetype it is. As we move up the kingdoms, the archetype embraces an additional dimension, going from pure form, to life, to soul and movement. When we come to the human kingdom we find biography. There is for each human being an individual biography—we are each our own species. However, within that biography there are processes which are common to all human beings, for example the seven year periods of life, the management of childhood diseases, and some basic views and attitudes. As we go further, we soon come to see that human life consists in creating a new biography out of the one which is so to speak delivered to us. We create our future 'self', the ego of our next incarnation. Here the human being stands



between the kingdoms of nature and the kingdoms of the spirit, as we saw in the creation myth: man, the new creature realised that he belonged to the old order but was not bound by it and would be able to aspire to higher things. Marriage is one of these things.

*Song of Songs IV, Marc Chagall*

# Marriage as a Path of Enlightenment

Jens-Peter Linde

'Marriage is an institution—and who would want to live in an institution?!' This was the comment of a comedian on the BBC ... One may think that he had missed the point deliberately, but good comedians usually don't and so we may want to look at the grain of wisdom in this joke and discover how we can develop a dynamic picture of marriage instead.

We might ask what marriage really is and we would find that, as a mere fixing of a relationship into given social norms, it could indeed become a dead institutionalised concept, one which would tie people into a box of set rules and regulations, a frame in which they could become stuck, as in an asylum or in a penitentiary.

Let us look instead at the Sacrament of Marriage as it is celebrated in The Christian Community and see in what way it can open up a different vista. We may see, that there is a dynamic potential in this formal act, something which would change the dead institution into a living organism.

Invisibly to the congregation, the day of the wedding has been prepared for, ideally in a year-long marriage course during which the couple would have met with the priest in a monthly rhythm to look at the various aspects of leading a life together. Much of that could be elucidated through learning to understand the text of the sacrament which is studied together. Thus the couple will truly be able to understand, to *stand under* and thus to support consciously the sacramental act; they will not just let it happen, they will not dream through it and afterwards wonder if a nice photo gallery is all that it was about...

Another invisible moment has been a sacramental consultation which the two individuals may have had in preparation for the wedding. Thus they would have shared with the 'Higher Being' of the community their intention to get married and asked for guidance and support. This, the spiritual world is *always* willing to give—but it must be asked for! The consultation as a sacramental act would thereafter have been fulfilled in jointly taking communion in the 'Act of Consecration of Man.'

When the wedding begins the priest asks to be able to fulfill the task through the help of the Being of Love, the Christ, who has bridged heaven

and earth: the archetypal polarity of which the male-female polarity in our lives reminds us. Thus the priest stands 'in the name of Him' before the couple and before all who will witness the marriage sacrament.

Then the celebrant asks the man and the woman with the very same words whether they intend to include within life communion the partner's spirit-destiny into their own, and each partner answers with 'Yes, I do.' It is important to witness that they have been addressed neither as man or woman, but as two individuals. But the two witnesses who are turned to now must be conscious that the two identical answers nevertheless come from two different constitutions.

This is a most important moment as indeed it helps us to understand the very essence of the marriage sacrament. We know that in our time any kind of relationship is lived and many forms are protected by law. But the one between one man and one woman allows for a special process in the souls of the partners: The conscious entering into a polar human constitution. (The joining of same sex couples has a different dynamic and thus different forms are being explored.)

This bridging of a polarity becomes apparent when the witnesses are reminded that they have taken into their ordinary sense-consciousness a super-sensible fact: that the man's 'spirit-will' and the woman's 'soul-spirit' have united in the communion of their—from now on joint—life-constitution.

In order to understand this we need to look at the composition of a human being in its threefold nature: in body, soul and spirit, as willing, feeling and thinking individuals. The witnesses need to understand that a man's archetypal decision derives from his intuitive thinking and descends into his wilful nature, based in his physical body, there to become his conscious intention: his 'Spirit-Will'.

A woman's physical body is usually less dense and leaves her feelings more to the fore. Thus her intentions, generally speaking, would come from her feeling soul, from her heart, and then become a conscious impulse to join her partner in marriage: Her 'Soul-Spirit' says, 'Yes, I do.'

The joint life constitution also is a mystery, perhaps best understood if one sees an old couple: If the partners had a long life together they often begin to look similar as if they were brother and sister. This is so because the outer appearance is based on matter growing into a form created by the life forces of an etheric body (which modern science calls the 'morphogenetic field of forces'). And if this etheric- or life-body becomes a common one during a long life together the two faces, the way of walking, the patterns of sleep, their tastes and habits can become very similar.



We shall come back to this mystery, but first we must point out that the witnesses are quite sternly addressed at this stage to become mindful that they are taking on to be the representative of the 'Being of the Community' in this moment, that they are taking on quite a serious task of accompanying the couple through all ups and downs of life.

In a next step the rings are exchanged. The sacrament in its renewed form demonstrates a metamorphosis: no longer 'With this ring I thee wed' (– 'and take you into possession' seemingly), but in The Christian Community the priest as an objective instance becomes a servant to this process. It is he or she who puts the rings on each partner's finger.

People who have seen a wedding always remember the following ritual: Two wooden sticks are held by the couple like a St. Andrew's cross and bound together by the priest with a red ribbon. It is held up then for everyone to see and it is said that this act of joining two essentially different constitutional expressions of *body* and *life* (like earth grown into wooden sticks) through the power of love (the red ribbon's *soul* imagination) is beheld by a *spirit* being.

We witness here in a picture a differentiation of the human being into *four* constituents: the physical body, the etheric life-body, the soul's astral-body and the spirit or 'I'. To be precise, in this instance the 'I' is called the 'Spirit of a god'; it is the 'I' of the *marriage angel* and through it of the *Being of Love* which joins the couple in this binding!

Now that we have taken in the fourfold gesture of the human being, we can begin to understand the following which, alas, has given rise to some misunderstandings. For, now the man is told to 'shine before her' *with* a spirit light which the Risen One allows to shine in his spirit, and the woman hears that she should 'follow' her husband in the spirit light which the Risen One lets shine in her *soul*.

If we listen to this superficially we might detect here an awkward instance of discrimination, but that cannot be meant. So we need to go a bit deeper and see how what is called spirit in the man is a togetherness of the 'I' and that part of his male astrality which has become conscious. Together they could become egoistically dominant and so the man is exhorted to shine not with this assumed 'light' which would blind him and leave her in the shadows, but with the light of the Being of Love.

In the woman that part of the life forces which is not used to keep her physical body healthy and in shape, is free to make up part of her soul together with the somewhat half-conscious part of her astrality. And as the free

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*The Painter and  
the Palette,*  
Marc Chagall

life forces have a male character (the female part being busy maintaining her physical body) they may give rise to a certain 'stress' in the woman's soul because, while her 'male' etheric would tend to 'elbow in,' her feminine astrality would naturally tend to adjust and give in to maintain harmony. But this could lead to a capping of her own evolving virtue. Here it is that the light of the one who gave His Self for the salvation of the world can shine into this realm and bring harmony and peace. Then a natural *following* of one's freely chosen destiny can become a conscious *fulfilling* of karma in this present life.

Indeed, this mystery points to the main purpose of marriage. We are used to thinking that evolution has given us hormonal incentives to stay together

to provide a safe haven for children. This is surely a part of the picture, but only a part and we know that in our time this principle doesn't seem to work. Instead an alternative purpose can come to the fore: *Marriage as a Path of Enlightenment*.

Initiation rites of the old mystery centres did this: they gave people conscious access to the realm of the etheric life forces after they had achieved a mastery of their astral soul forces. If the man learns to *give* in his intentions into the radiance of Christ, and the woman learns to *fulfill* her calling by rising into the light-sphere of the Risen One, and if both learn to do that ever more consciously then they can master their astral one-sidedness and enter consciously into the life forces of each other in community of life and love, of table and bed, of habit and culture.

This or anything else that is relevant may be addressed in the sermon which comes at this point of the ritual. It will find a further dimension and depth in the following passages in which, what has happened under the eyes of the *Being of Love, Evolution and Freedom* is blessed. It is asked that the spirit world give help to the couple and illumine the path ahead. For they have come from the widths of worlds to find each other. Now they intend to lead a life together and that can become a force, not just for their own 'happiness', but for the wellbeing of the world.

This is something which is too often overlooked: Certainly, the Christian sacraments are good for the people who engage in them. But I believe it is just as important that through the sacraments Divine forces can flow into the aura and even right into the substance of 'Gaia', the living Being of the Earth. Her constitution is so exploited and damaged by our shortsighted actions that without the sacraments Her ability to sustain life would only become possible through severe cataclysms in nature. The evolution in freedom of truly human beings will hopefully lead to a conscious adaptation to the needs of the world. What we can learn for such adapting by giving in, by asking and understanding, through rubbing of corners, by swallowing and asserting—in short, by loving—what we can thus practise in marriage will then become a blessing for the 'good and happiness of all mankind' and indeed, for the whole world around us.

Thus, learning to experience the sacrament as the beginning of an initiation into powerful mysteries of life can give us the feeling: Here something is constituted which is not a fixed and formal 'institution', but rather an organism of evolution; rather like a garden which we want to cultivate faithfully to give joy not just to ourselves, but to all those beings, human or otherwise, who will behold its radiance.

# Homosexuality and the Bible

Paul Corman

What does Jesus say about homosexuality and about same sex marriage?  
And what do you say about them?

Actually, in order to answer the first question, we would have to leave the rest of the space in this article blank. Jesus says absolutely nothing at all about either topic. But in order to help us along with the second question and at the end of the article to leave us hopefully with a lot more questions, we might well ask ourselves, if Jesus didn't say anything, why all the fuss about the topic in certain Christian circles? One reason is that the Old Testament does seem to have something to say as does seemingly the Apostle Paul. The conditional quality of these statements ('seems to', 'seemingly') stems from the fact that the word homosexual is a modern word creation that dates to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Neither the Hebrew in the Old Testament, nor the Greek of the New Testament knows this word. The 1946 RSV edition of the English translation was the first to use the words homosexual and homosexuality, and these translations are very questionable. We will turn to some of these phrases in just a bit.

A central aspect of the Movement for Religious Renewal is a fresh approach to Bible texts, especially New Testament ones. We try hard usually to look at the aura of the word(s), the biblical context within which they appear, the social aspects of the times, and the uses of the word(s) in other contemporary sources.

The question of homosexual relationships could be an invitation to examine more closely our thoughts and feelings about these topics to see in what they are grounded; if the 'movement' enshrined in our name is to be at work, we need to make sure that we are not reacting to and operating out of old prejudices, 'accepted' norms, moralistic judgments and fears. The Christian Community zealously guards individual freedom of thought, free from social and theological dogmas and traditions. The only area where our freedom is limited is in all that is directly related to the celebration of sacraments and rituals. In that area we agree to abide by the forms ac-

cepted by the body of priests, who in turn undertake not intentionally to change anything related to these forms. In every other regard, we support and respect individual choice. I believe that the question of homosexuality and same-sex relationships deserves the same openness, as it may be one of the few topics that will define the course of The Christian Community toward the future as a movement for religious renewal, one which prays in every Act of Consecration of Man to join with Christ to unite us with the world's evolving.

As an example of the importance of a new and considered look at the original texts and their translation, I would like to begin with the Old Testament and with the events that occurred in Sodom. Sodomy, used to refer to a sexual practice as such, does not appear in the Hebrew or the Greek text, and the word Sodomite in the original texts only refers to a person born in Sodom. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century a hermit monk, Peter Damian, seems to have been the first to use the phrase to refer to a sexual act between two men. From then on, the concepts of sodomy and sexuality became at the same time more intertwined, but also more diverse in the church. Sodomy laws have included any non-pro-creative sexual act such as masturbation or oral sex in a heterosexual context. In some parts of the world a sodomite is a homosexual. Be that as it may, the Sin of Sodom was not homosexuality, at least not according to other biblical texts that refer to it. In the Old Testament, for example Ezekiel 16: 48–49 says: This was the sin of your sister, Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. The Book of Wisdom refers to Sodom's sin as 'a bitter hatred of strangers' and 'making slaves of guests who were benefactors.' Other references appear in Isaiah and Jeremiah, but nowhere is there any mention any sort of sexuality as the Sin of Sodom.

When we look at the overall context, the three men (angels) that appear to Lot in Sodom and seek shelter in Lot's home, have come directly from a visit to Lot's uncle Abraham, who heartily welcomed and properly received them as was fitting and demanded in those time and in that culture. The Sodomites, however, do just the opposite. The story is, dark and difficult to understand, but no matter how you turn it, even if you wish to think of what occurred as homosexual behaviour, the sin was then not necessarily the sex itself, but, as stated elsewhere in the Bible, a lack of respect and inhospitality. And if we do take it as a reference to homosexual behaviour, then we would have to call it rape and in no way a loving or consenting encounter between persons of the same sex. Rape of a woman by a

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in Lima, Peru.*

man or vice versa is a dastardly deed, but it does not make all heterosexual encounters bad and sinful. Should it be allowed to define all homosexuality?

The Sodom account Genesis 19: 1–9 is one of six biblical texts that are most often used by conservative Christians to ‘prove’ that homosexuality is not compatible with proper Christian behaviour. The others in the Old Testament are the Creation account, Genesis 1–2; the Holiness code Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 and in the New Testament, three letters of Paul which make reference to the holiness code of the Old Testament: Romans 1:24–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

There are many elements in the injunctions of the holiness code. Many things are considered abominations and many transgressions punishable by death. There are some, a few, a very few, two to be exact, Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 that seem harshly to condemn homosexuality, and in the New Testament letters of Paul. In Romans 1:24–27; I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10, there are three mentions of the Old Testament code that are quoted as very harsh condemnations of homosexuality and yet none of them use the word homosexuality or homosexual, but rather odd word groupings in both Hebrew and later in Paul’s Greek that have long been assumed to refer to all sorts of homosexual behaviour. Some examples from the Old Testament, would have to be literally translated something like this in Lev. 18:22: ‘And with a male you shall not lay lyings of a woman.’ What that really may or may not mean is open to interpretation, and, of course, depending on the thinking that is brought to the text, one will interpret and then translate one way or another. In the New Testament: arsenkoites, a Greek noun that literally would mean ‘male-beds’ is found in Timothy and Corinthians, but the meaning is not clear enough to justify the typical translation of ‘sodomite’ or ‘homosexual’. Another word malakoi in Corinthians means ‘soft’, but again it is unfair to assume that Paul is talking about any specific ‘gay’ demeanour. Here we can only take a general look at these texts of the Holiness code injunctions and Paul’s references to them. First of all there are many different injunctions in both Testaments. Some are called abominations, some punishable by stoning, some called lewd, some ungodly or unholy. But the list, especially in the Old Testament of abhorrent abominations is quite extensive and includes eating unauthorized foods, sowing different sorts of plants in the same field, using clothing made of cloth woven from two different fibres, and among those acts punishable by death are not obeying one’s parents and not keeping the Sabbath. In Paul’s letters there is an injunction about women speaking in the congregations, others about divorce and so on.

If we were to take all these commands and injunctions at face value, there would be no Christian Community, for no woman could be a priest. She would be prohibited from speaking in the congregation. And we would probably have altogether many fewer members and priests, for many of us would have already been stoned to death as adulterers or at the very least, excluded from the community as divorced individuals, unworthy of God's congregation. It seems quite haughty of us, now centuries later, to choose which injunctions from the list of 'abominations' we wish to throw overboard and which we wish to chastise most gravely. It is remarkable how some Christians who cite the Old Testament as the reason for condemning homosexual acts, are so unaware of the many aspects of their behaviour which would be condemned if the same standard were applied. Examination of the context of every one of these 'anti-gay' injunctions shows that they have nothing to do with loving relationships between two consenting adults, but rather with sexual enslavement practices, using sex to lord over the more vulnerable, or temple prostitution—a common religious practice that the Israelites could in no way be encouraged to follow. The idea of a loving relationship between two adults of the same sex is not contemplated in either Testament, except perhaps the love between King David and Jonathan which was seen as superior to the love of a woman, although it may not have been a sexual relationship.

The point here is that today we need to be talking about loving relations between two adults, some of whom wish to cement their commitment to one another not just with the civil laws of the land where they live, but who also wish to profess their commitment to one another within the religious community in which they have found a spiritual home, in front of an altar dedicated to serving Christ Jesus, the God of love. Two individuals of the same sex who so find themselves and who come together in love and have

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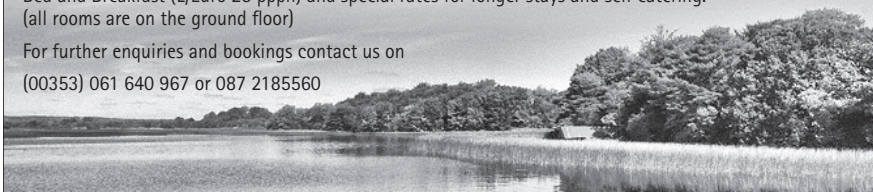
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recognized that there are deep karmic aspects between them that want to be explored and worked on and through, should be able to be to do that in a way that is not just a friendship, not just a sexual-romantic relationship, but in a way that is, if they so choose, a community of life, recognized as such before the eyes of men and of God. From such a decision and such a commitment and such a community of life, if we can rise above our long-standing prejudices and traditions, and also allow for the validity of such a decision and commitment to find its expression before the altars of The Christian Community, these marriages can bring health and healing and happiness to all on mankind, just as is expected of any other community of life that is sealed by the word of the couple in our sacrament of marriage. Our sacrament of marriage is too gender specific to be used to seal the commitment of persons of the same sex. We are not able to change the words of the sacraments. All priests take an oath to guard against such willful changes. There may come a time far in the future where the human condition has so evolved that changes to our sacraments will become necessary, but still we would need the aid of an inspired initiate to be able to 'read' those changes in the spiritual world, the source of all the sacraments, and translate them into the corresponding, appropriate human wording. Until such a time comes, indeed in order for that time to come, we have a lot of individual work to do on ourselves and a lot of work to do in community. This does not mean creating now a new sacrament or ritual, but we need a worthy cultic form for individuals of the same-sex to consecrate their community of life before an altar. That possibility already exists within The Christian Community. It can take the form of a Close of Day ceremony, but the content of what that Close of Day type ceremony could be needs to be explored and developed, but also the 'social environment' of The Christian Community that surrounds homosexuals and same-sex couples also needs to be explored, talked about and evolved. We are just at the beginning of a very necessary dialogue within The Christian Community on these issues. Below are a few sources (there are many more) that can be of help in the explorations that we need to be pursuing together.

*The Bible, Christianity, and Homosexuality*, a study by Justin R. Cannon See: [www.InclusiveOrthodoxy.org](http://www.InclusiveOrthodoxy.org)

*The Gay Gospels* by Keith Sharpe, see [www.o-books.com](http://www.o-books.com)

*What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* by Daniel A. Helminiak, Alamo Square Press, NM, 2007

A YouTube video by Matthew Vines <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY>



To divine\_creator@theuniverse.cosmos  
RE: gay marriage

Peter Howe

Dear Divine,

I'm sorry to bother you when you're on sabbatical but there's a bit of an issue developing here.

You created me and I'm grateful for this. You created me gay. Some people blame me, saying it was my choice, but we know you did it. And anyway, what's to blame? I credit you for it. It's a wonderful and curious and exciting development of the human race which raises all kinds of questions—and I'm truly happy about it. Thank you!

Admittedly, it's taken me an awful long time, 60 years, to get to this point of really owning it and loving it. It was so much easier when I was in the closet and in a straight marriage. Everything fitted, so to speak, and I had a secure role in society, in the family and in the natural order. And of course in your magnificent world of spiritual archetypes too. Unfortunately, it nearly killed me to keep up the pretence.

Strangely, when I started telling the truth most people were sad about it. Understandably, they would've preferred things to stay as they'd always known them, secure and predictable, but that's not how you made the world, is it? Luckily I had one friend who screamed with happiness when I told her, not because I was gay but because I was, at last, honouring the truth about myself.

Anyway, the bone I have to pick with you is that, having blessed my marriage—which, although it was a happy one and graced with three fabulous children, was based on me pretending to be someone else, in effect lying—why won't you now bless my present relationship with a man? We love each other, we've been faithful and committed to each other for years and we have a loving community around us. We both look after our families: parents, grans and granpas, bro's and sis's, my children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, uncles and aunts ... Okay, we can't have children but nor can lots of couples and we could make a nice home for a young person who would otherwise have no-one. A lot of people here are saying marriage is mainly about procreation—but that's not a good argument from someone in your position: a spiritual leader.

So dear Divine, what I'm driving at is ... how about a Sacrament? I know you've always said men are men and women are women, Mars and Venus and all that, but nowadays it's all

*Peter Howe is  
a member of the  
congregation in  
Stourbridge.*



*Pan,*  
Marc Chagall

changing. People feel different and so many don't fit into traditional gender roles or even into their bodies. Marriage is meant for male and female, you said. Well, we are! We're both male and both female. I know you'll understand that because you're in a similar position yourself—but we have to cope with life on this planet! It's not easy being a human being trapped in a feminine astral body with a male ether body and a man's physique. Or vice versa. I mean, just clothes shopping is a nightmare.

You see, in particular, it's tough for young people. When you first wake up to these things you're just a child or still growing up and you're surrounded by a world full of ignorance, unreliable emotions and misinformation. At that tender age it dawns on you that you don't have a role in the great story of the world: you've been written out of the script. You're not there in the Bible except as something to be stoned (and not in a good way); in history your role models are exotic and isolated figures who usually come to a bad end. Even natural science, which is terribly tolerant and enlightened, has this theory of evolution which seems to say that you're some kind of

random genetic mutation which is not going to be much use for the continuance of the species (which does ignore an awful lot of carers, nurses, teachers, musicians, artists, writers etc).

So you see, however understanding society is becoming, you still feel excluded from nature itself, from the universe, and from the divine archetypal world order. You're so alone. No wonder so many of those growing-up young people hurt themselves or try to do away with themselves.

Now, before I go, we also have to talk about that tricky bit in the marriage service about him 'shining before her' and her 'following him'. Lovely words of course—you've always had a way with the word—but I mean, honestly, pretty sexist isn't it? Very 1920s. Don't you think it would be beautiful—and true—if BOTH of us had to shine and BOTH follow? Makes much more sense if you ask me because that's what has to happen in a modern marriage.

A good friend of mine who's a poet, said that the task of the man today is to learn from the feminine:

*...some day there will be girls and women whose name will no longer signify merely an opposite of the masculine, but something in itself, something that makes one think, not of any complement and limit, but only of life and existence: the feminine human being.*

*This advance will (at first much against the will of the outstripped men) change the love-experience, which is now full of error, will alter it from the ground up, reshape it into a relation that is meant to be of one human being to another, no longer of man to woman. And this more human love (that will fulfill itself, infinitely considerate and gentle, and kind and clear in binding and releasing) will resemble that which we are preparing with struggle and toil, the love that consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other.*

RAINER MARIA RILKE (he's a chap, by the way)

So, what about it, dear boy? We're having to decide things on our own since you left, doing our best to develop a compassionate, empathetic society. But we do need a hand with this one—to save Marriage from degenerating into an institution based on tradition and procreation. With your blessing we could give it a spiritual foundation: a uniting of human masculine and feminine as they are mixed, uniquely and ever-changing, in each one of your human creature-creatives. You could help us to shine before, and to follow, each other's solitude.

As always I look forward to hearing from you.

With love, Peter

# On giving a blessing for same-gender partnerships

To initiate discussion on the subject of  
'The Christian Community and homosexuality'

Nail Michael el Arif

About ten years ago I asked the Circle of Seven, the body which leads The Christian Community, if it would be possible within The Christian Community to have a blessing given for my own and my life partner's partnership. We have now been together for more than 20 years.

The correspondence which followed continued for just over two years. It was fair and friendly but ended in a definite No. I then suggested that the existing form of the Close of Day service be used. The priest might use her or his own words in the Close of Day Address, and we, as a couple, might exchange rings, make our vows to each other, and so on, taking personal responsibility for the words spoken. The Christian Community would provide the setting and ritual context for the occasion. But even this was not possible then. It was extremely painful for me. With the help of others, my partner and I then found our own form of marriage rite, which we used in 2004. Disappointment in the 'Movement for Religious Renewal' and doubt as to whether it deserves that name, remained.

The 'Future Now' Christian Community's international Whitsun Congress in Dortmund in 2010 included a workshop on homosexuality. This gave me new hope after a period of resignation; hope that our Church may be capable of change. An initiative arose and led to a conference in June 2012. I want to tell you about this. People of all ages, occupations and genders came together (including Christian Community priests who are themselves in same-gender relationships). Among them were also people who were not directly 'affected' (a term used with some self-irony over and over again during the conference). The life experience of those who attended showed wide variance in the way in which people in The Christian Community dealt with their experiences and their homosexuality. Some struggled to hold back their tears, even as adults, as they told of extremely difficult experiences with priests and members of the congregation when in their young days they had taken the risk of admitting to their homosexuality

(including attempts to 'cure' this putative disease). Others reported positive responses they had met with, and everything in between.

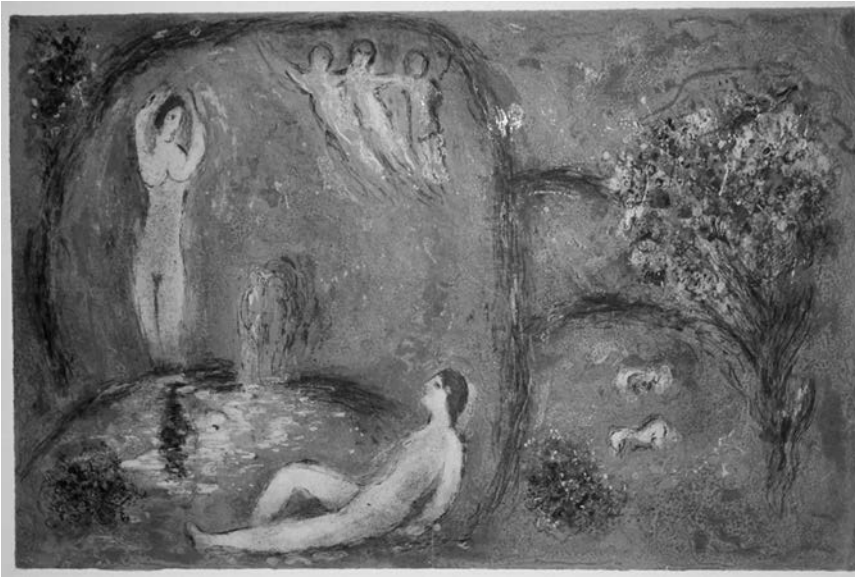
The priests reported that The Christian Community had now instituted a blessing for partnerships. The Circle of Seven had appointed a commission called the Blessings Group. At the group's suggestion the Circle of Seven have now decided that any priest may give a blessing of the kind I outlined above (Close of Day service, Address of a suitable kind, and elements given an individual form that may precede or follow these). It became clear during the conference that the form which originally seemed to us to be more of a 'second-class marriage' or indeed discriminatory, may after all be the right one for the time being. It does not merely leave room for individual elements but actually demands them. The fact that apart from the Close of Day service there is no established rite means that every couple must work with the priest to create their words, form and content, or at least decide to adopt contents from couples that have gone before them, in so far as these are available.

We can begin to work in the way attempted in such a modest way at that weekend and follow up these issues, step by step finding modest answers. In time these may then contribute to the creation of such a partnership blessing rite. And with more and more people having delicate antennae for things of the spirit we can try and sense if the spiritual world felt it to have been right or not. The next couple might then take it up and develop it further, in 'spreading concentric circles', so that we'll have a 'better failure' on successive occasions.

One individual put it like this: 'Something a community can well do is to share in the struggle to enable an inspiration or intuition shine forth. This might well be the aim of a Community of Christians.'

The modest present form of partnership blessing could then be like a mother or a father who has grown up and grown older and provides shelter and protection for a child who must still grow, change and develop. To stay with the metaphor, some may consider the child to be ugly or useless, but it lives and needs help like any child. It is up to all the priests, members and friends of The Christian Community, and indeed us, the 'affected', to let it grow and develop—and of course to the Being of The Christian Community itself.

To me, personally, it was clear by the end of that weekend conference that I must come out of my retreat into anger and the sulks. As always in life, it does not get one anywhere to act from the victim perspective, even if one would ultimately wish for The Christian Community itself to decide to take up our cause. Ultimately we also came to realize that discrimination, when it occurred, was probably only rarely due to ill-will, but merely



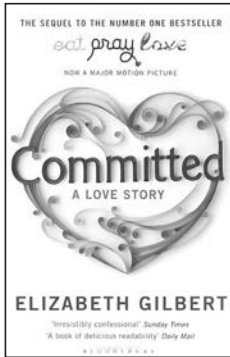
*The  
Nymphs'  
cave,*  
Marc  
Chagall

a sign of prejudice, feeling out of one's depth, and feelings of helplessness. It is therefore up to us to give support. One individual put it like this: 'We cannot simply ask for recognition but must also give recognition to the anxieties or at least uncertainty of those other people.'

Most of us who love someone of the same gender have never been able simply to be ourselves. We have had to consciously face up to everything usual, traditional, 'normal' and realize that we do not fit into those categories but must consciously go our own way. We cannot take it as a matter of course (unfortunately) that our love for another will be welcomed by others. Our next step may be that we meet once a year to continue work on these issues. The point is that love between two people, irrespective of their sexual orientation, deserves our respect, goodwill and support. And to create a rite worthy of the love between people of the same gender, making sure that the rite is practised in a living way.

As to what you, dear reader, can do with regard to this; perhaps give even fuller consideration to the question as to why you may be refusing to give thought to the problems of lovers of the same gender or else to support them. You might talk about this in your congregation. You might consider how you would react as a congregation if a couple were to come and ask for a partnership blessing in your church. You might ask your priest if he or she knows of the blessing celebration and would be prepared to perform the ceremony. Readers who wish are invited to contact me about this via my email address [nail.el.arif@gmx.de](mailto:nail.el.arif@gmx.de)

# Reviews



**Committed:  
A Love Story**  
Elizabeth Gilbert  
320 pages,  
Bloomsbury  
ISBN-10: 1408809451

*Review by  
Kevin Street*

A few years ago Elizabeth Gilbert's book *Eat Pray Love* became a best seller. In it she described how for a year following a messy divorce she took a sabbatical to try to re-establish her emotional equilibrium, and ended by falling in love with Felipe, a Brazilian born Australian citizen. After a few stays with Elizabeth (a US citizen) in America, Felipe is refused re-entry into the States. The only way he can get back in (his business was also based in America) is if the two of them get married.

It is at this point that *Committed* really begins. Both Elizabeth and Felipe were determined not to re-marry, but had sworn eternal fidelity. Thanks to Homeland Security this was to be challenged, and as they both wandered from country to country whilst the authorities considered and vetted Felipe's background, Elizabeth plunged into research, to try to redefine her own relationship to marriage, as to just what the background to marriage was, and how the western Christian tradition of it developed.

Gilbert's findings are wide ranging and not always easy to pin down. As she says herself:

*'Marriage it seems, does not like to sit still long enough for anyone to capture its portrait very clearly. Marriage shifts. It changes over the centuries ... constantly, surprisingly, swiftly. It's not even a safe bet to define marriage ... as a sacred union between one man and one woman. First of all, marriage has*

*not even been considered 'sacred,' not even within the Christian tradition.'*

And it is within the Christian tradition that I will limit this review, as interesting as Gilbert's forays into other cultures are. Starting her review of the Christian tradition in the Old Testament, Gilbert identifies that earliest marriage was more to achieve physical safety, that of being in a family guaranteed defence—the more kin you had, the safer you were. For the Hebrews, the blood line was of paramount importance, and marriage was central to this.

Jesus' teaching turned this on its head, with the basic tenet that we are all united in one human family. Christianity confronted fierce tribal loyalties, placing outcasts such as Samaritans, Romans, and tax collectors as being of equal importance in the eyes of God as 'the chosen people,' but this posed another problem—if you are going to deconstruct the entire social system, what do you replace it with? Part of the answer lay in the early belief that the end of time was imminent, and so procreation in the physical sense was irrelevant. Becoming a Christian was the result of conversion, not what tribe or family you were born into.

For the first 1000 years of Christianity, the church regarded monogamous marriage as 'as marginally less wicked than flat out whoring—but only marginally so.' This didn't stop people from getting married, and having families, but without any supervision from the church. Increasingly marriage became an efficient way to manage wealth and material assets. Christians married privately in their own homes, in every day clothing in impromptu ceremonies lasting only a few minutes, but always in the presence of witnesses, should there be any later legal wrangling. Similarly they could separate in an uncomplicated easy way.

However by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the church started to take a clos-

*Kevin Street is a member of The Christian Community in Stourbridge and manages the subscriptions of Perspectives.*

er interest in marriage alliances, especially between royal dynasties. The early Church Fathers and their thoughts about re-creating heaven on earth had given way to church leaders who were in themselves mighty political figures; the papacy needed to keep in control. And one way was to ensure that those who married to the Church's advantage stayed married. In 1215 therefore, marriage became a sacrament, and divorce became an offence worthy of ex-communication. For the first time in human history marriage became a 'life sentence.'

Gilbert continues to chart the history of western marriage up to the present and the debate over gay marriage—more of that later. Through it all, she emphasises that women gained less from marriage than men, and she details the legal notion of 'coverture'—that a woman's individual civil existence is erased the moment she marries. As late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century a British judge could rule: 'The very being of the woman is suspended during marriage.' The gravity of marriage was to be summed up in an old Polish adage: 'Before going to war say one prayer. Before going to sea, say two prayers. Before getting married, say three.'

The cruelties of forbidding inter-racial marriages, of slaves not being allowed to marry, and yet more surveys showing how married women constantly 'lose out' in so many ways all seem to pile up the miseries of marriage, and yet Elizabeth and Felipe have to marry if their relationship is to take root in America. Fortunately for Elizabeth, her relationship to marriage is redefined (and rescued) by the book *The Subversive Family*, by Ferdinand Mount—who she then finds out to be a Conservative peer, the last person she would have normally expected to read. In it Mount explores the idea that no authority can control what happens between a couple who are in a marriage that has not been arranged. This deeply private 'cell' can stand apart from anything the state might want to impose—and he cites the left and right wing extremes of power who variously tried to ban marriage, insisting instead that loyalty had to be to the party,

whatever colour or emblem it sported. When this (inevitably) failed, the party allowed marriage as if it was inventing it. Similarly, the church, having turned its back on marriage for one thousand years then 'allowed' it—together with its own rules.

Gilbert concludes:

*So perhaps I've had this story deliciously backwards the whole time. To somehow suggest that society invented marriage, and then forced human beings to bond with each other, is perhaps absurd. ...We invented marriage. Couples invented marriage.'*

The debate around gay marriage is an element that Gilbert returns to several times, and she places it within the broad evolutionary sweep of society adapting, out of necessity, to new partnerships. She also notes that at a time when more and more heterosexual couples are turning their backs on marriage in any form, same sex couples are campaigning to be 'let in'—something that she concludes might just give the institution of marriage the boost it needs into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Certainly through her research, Gilbert comes to a very special place regarding marriage, and the last section of the book is in the form of Q&A, when she states:

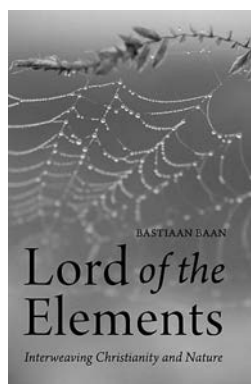
Everything I have ever learned about life—spiritual and otherwise—helps me to do better within this marriage than I have in past relationships. I think this is part of the reason that marriage is so ill-advised for young people: with rare exceptions, most 22 year olds have not been sanded down or humbled enough by life's experiences to have acquired the wisdom and perspective that make long term human intimacy possible. But yes, certainly, the lessons of a sincere spiritual quest have been awfully helpful in negotiating the challenge of running a household...

I am not saying that marriage should not be seen as holy or sacred, but I object when those words are used as weapons against individuals within something that should be a private union, and that is almost invariably a complicated one.'

I found reading *Committed* to be informative, and it certainly helps to place marriage



in an historical context—whatever position The Christian Community adopts to any aspect of marriage has to be seen as a part of this continuum, though Elizabeth Gilbert could have gained much from finding out something of how the marriage sacrament is regarded by The Christian Community. I might want to nuzzle about some of the anecdotal diversions, and the massive emphasis on American research, but overall this is a helpful and lively debate.



***Lord of the Elements:  
Interweaving Christianity  
and Nature***

**Bastiaan Baan**  
Paperback: 248  
pages, Floris Books;  
£12.99  
ISBN: 0863159591

***Review by  
Donna Simmonds***

In the short span of less than 250 pages, Bastiaan Baan attempts a monumental task: to survey and make sense of the complex relationship between Christianity and nature. Writing as a Christian Community priest, from his own experiences in nature, and drawing from historical, esoteric and theological sources, Baan presents us with a rich and lively narrative. Serving to further enliven the text, Baan weaves in extensive first person accounts of visionary experiences of nature as well as artistic pieces such as poetry, vignettes and excerpts from plays.

A major theme of the book is that a relationship with the Christ is not antithetical to a love of and profound relationship with nature, though history tells us that more often than not the Church was highly sceptical of if not completely lacking in any sympathy toward nature. Baan carefully begins to develop this theme by looking at a powerful picture of Christianized human development: an angel stands at the edge of a great

morass where the human being, stuck in the mud of matter, raises his arm to be pulled out. Released from the bondage of matter, from the death of matter, the human being can realize his destiny as a spiritual being. Moreover, he can then, in turn, work to redeem and liberate the rest of Creation.

What a beautifully freeing and nourishing thought—to understand that the human being has not only the power to desecrate and destroy nature, but to redeem and spiritualize it as well. Bastiaan Baan sets himself the task of showing us how this sacred work has been envisaged—though often obscured—since Christ walked on the face of the Earth and how we may begin to take up this awesome responsibility.

Throughout the book, Baan gives us many helpful and practical ideas on how to approach nature in a Christ-filled way. He stresses the need for selfless observation, challenging us to ‘walk through nature so that we enter a state of surrender and receptivity, where nature expresses itself to us and not the other way round.’ Developing an artistic sensitivity to nature is one path we could explore. Another is the conscious use of biodynamic methods to tend ‘our patch’ of earth. Following the cycle of the year and paying special attention to the unfolding of the festivals is recommended. And, of course, participating in the sacraments so that Christ can penetrate into matter helps heal the earth and bridge the divide between human and non human realms.

In order to develop a meaningful and right relationship to nature, one needs to have an understanding of nature’s workings, of the ‘spirit of the Earth’ (Natura) and of the elemental beings who are everywhere, awaiting recognition from human beings. And, critically, one needs to recognize the One who is at the heart of the right working of these beings, Christ Jesus. Through His deed on Golgotha and Resurrection, the Sun God (recognized in most if not all religious traditions) became the

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Christian Community  
in Edinburgh.*

Lord of the Elements. Here we enter the richest part of this book, a fascinating description of Christ as Lord of the Elements in chapters on Genesis, the New Testament, St John and alchemy. I especially appreciate how Baan refers to the sacraments and what takes place at the altar. An example from the chapter entitled 'St John the Alchemist':

*The three elements here are shown to be main witnesses to the resurrection: water, fire (blood is the carrier of warmth in the human being) and air (spirit, pneuma). Between these elements the mystery of the transformation of earth, the transubstantiation, takes place, until the fourth element, the bread (earth) is also transubstantiated. This literally takes place in the sacrament, where these three 'witnesses' play a part in the mysterious process of transubstantiation...This takes place at the altar when water and wine are mixed in the chalice and as the third 'substance' the ritual word (pneuma) is spoken in the stream of air. There the three elements unite into one. That is where the transubstantiation of the earth begins, the moment the water and the wine are combined, are held up in the Offering and united with the ritual word.*

Where *Lord of the Elements* is less powerful, more hesitant, is when Baan speaks of the elemental beings themselves. Tales of encounters with elementals (many of which are, in my opinion, overly long), fairy tales, poetry and descriptions give us much to consider, but it is as if this material runs parallel to the rest of the book and the two streams do not mix comfortably.

For me it is also problematic that Baan does not tackle but only hints at the question of evil or wrong-doing in terms of the elemental world and thus one could be left with the impression that all forces in nature are benign. Even the experience of the father and child in Goethe's "The Earlkonig" is cited not as an example of malicious intent by an elemental being, but as an example of an

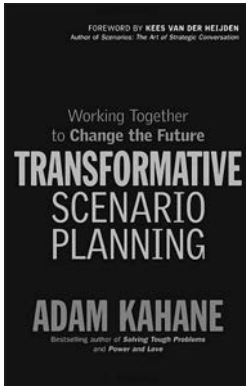
adult not listening to a child. This might be an important consideration, but the intentions of the Elf King are worthy of examination too!

At the very end of the book Baan does caution that not all nature-beings are helpful or friendly but it is, perhaps, too easy to lose this warning in the face of overwhelmingly accepted presumably positive encounters with elementals that are not accompanied by descriptions of how the people having such experiences determined the good-will of these beings or the accuracy of what they experienced. In a time when one can fill one's bookshelves to overflowing with volume after volume describing meetings with nature spirits, it seems paramount that sufficient time be spent in determining the exact nature of these encounters.

Baan finishes *Lord of the Elements* where he began—with a plea that we spiritualize our perceptions of nature. Whereas in the opening of the book Baan gave us the picture of the human being stuck in the morass, now Baan tells us that elemental beings are also chained to matter. It is up to us to take up our task in preparation for becoming the tenth hierarchy and working to free the earth from the death forces of nature. But we in turn can only do this if we have a relationship with the Christ:

The elemental beings cannot realize the future without the help of human beings. We human beings cannot do our work without the help of Christ. The work we do is continually strengthened and carried by elemental beings, as long as we act morally. But even Christ, who embodies the beginning of the new creation, cannot help us if he is not helped by us in turn.

This book can enable us to take a positive step toward our right destiny as human beings. It can be used as a friendly guide and source of encouragement so that each of us can find the courage to stand upright, free from the bonds of materialism, balanced between the earth at our feet and the heavens at our head.



*Transformative  
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**Adam Kahane**  
Berrett-Koehler  
Publishers, Inc. San  
Francisco, a BK cur-  
rents book  
Paperback: 168p  
ISBN: 1609944909

*Review by Deborah Ravetz*

This is third book I have read by Adam Kahane. His first two books, *Love and Power* and *Solving Tough Problems* preceded this new publication. I have also listened to Adam speak about his ideas and work and there is something very particular about the experience. Often I have spoken with many people in the audience, and to feel with the a huge amount of pain because they experience an inability to solve conflict both in their own working or personal lives and in the events they know about on an international scale.

They were all seeking tools to meet these problems with renewed energy and with ways of working that would break old patterns and build new futures. The fact that people attending these lectures or reading these books are actually looking for answers for real life questions give the gatherings a special energy and sense of community.

Adam Kahane defines the terms 'power and love' on the hand of the theologian Paul Tillich who was an inspiration to Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement in America.

Tillich describes power as the need for every individual to realise their potential to its fullest extent and love as the need to bring together that which is broken.

Kahane then goes on to describe the complexity of Love and Power which both have a generate and degenerate face. Power

and love need each other to be generate. They are interdependent. Without love, power becomes reckless and abusive; without power, love becomes sentimental and anaemic. We can notice that we fall into degenerate power when we are afraid of being hurt, and into degenerate love when we are afraid of causing someone else hurt.

He also brings to our attention the existence of a dynamic which he says can be found at the bottom of every toxic group dynamic, whether it be a family, friends or big business or government. This he describes as the 'peace-monger'. This is the person who is so afraid that processes and meetings will end in destruction if the real issues are brought up that they are constantly trying to broker a pseudo peace. Such peace or such community is always unstable and inauthentic simply because the trials and crises necessary to reaching real consensus are avoided, thus closing down the moments of transformation and movement amongst individuals and groups. They therefore inevitably break down.

I was fascinated as well to read about the problems Adam has encountered in idealistic settings. There he found problems far greater than those in hard hitting business. He suggests that it is the denial of the power dynamic in idealistic settings which means that degenerate power can take control simply because by not naming something it is able to flourish unchecked.

The two previous books explore this thesis and its practice. Adam is honest about his failures but suggests that by learning to speak both the language of love and power and by daring to enter the process of working with these two dynamics there will be times when we can break through to understanding which can lead to transformative action and change.

I work as a social sculptor using a work called the Search for the Deep Self. When-

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part of the editorial  
team of Perspectives.*


ever I do my work I also do a presentation about Adam Kahane's ideas. The major response to this presentation is overwhelming relief in hearing a diagnostic and practical tools for understanding conflict and learning to work with it. It is interesting as well that this tool is relevant for both the personal and the wider issues we are confronted with.

This third book adds to the material by offering stories and examples of the different projects with which Kahane has been involved and where these ideas have been put into practice on the ground. Anyone interested in becoming literate in love and power will be enthusiastic to read these stories and explore what was learnt there. The bare theory is filled out here with narratives. These show how groups of stakeholders could be built into communities of trust and creativity that make visible what can be achieved by learning to speak together even with one's greatest opponent or enemy in order to achieve a better future. The book is moving and inspiring and it makes visible years of work. It is fascinating not only to read of the successes but also the unexpected connections and impacts of the scenario meetings sometimes years later.

What becomes clear from this book is the level of commitment and patience needed to build the space in which these transformative meetings can take place. Time and energy and the courage for self-questioning on everyone's part can give rise to breakthroughs and new and positive directions.

Through my own work it has become increasingly clear to me how much individuals long to be able to work together for a better future. This book in conjunction with Adam's other two books provides tools for this and examples of it is possible.

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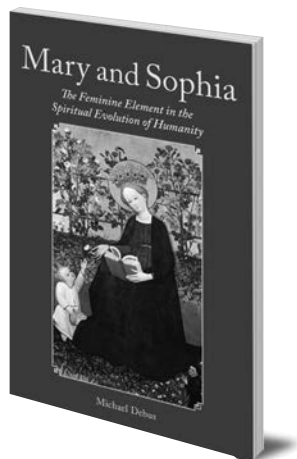
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Michael Debus has taught at the seminary of the Christian Community in Stuttgart since 1978.

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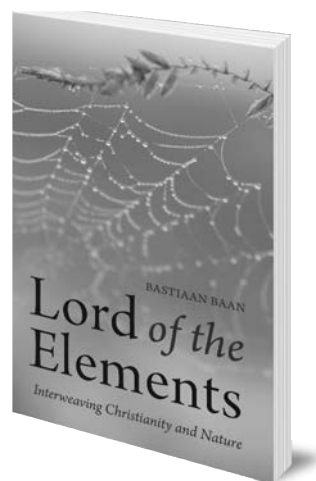
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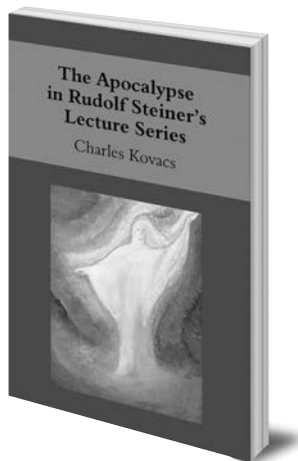


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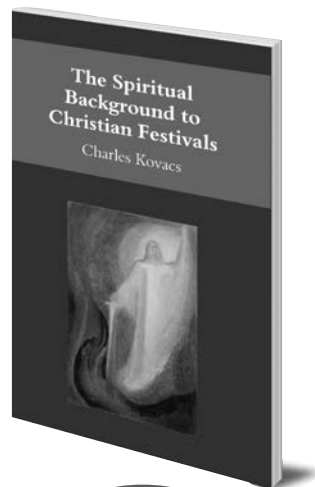
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