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**SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, HOMOSEXUALITY, AND SOCIETAL HEALTH:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING**

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Abstract

This work critically examines the Catholic Church's theological and social-scientific arguments concerning homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and the institution of heterosexual marriage. Drawing on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, natural law theory, and a wide range of empirical studies in sociology, psychology, public health, and family science, the article evaluates claims about the health benefits of heterosexual marriage, the purported harms of legalizing same-sex unions, and the Catholic understanding of human sexuality as ordered toward procreation and spousal unity. The discussion is structured around four interrelated themes: (1) the theological and sacramental significance of marriage in Catholic doctrine; (2) the empirical evidence regarding the health, psychological, and social benefits of heterosexual marriage; (3) the perceived threats to the institution of marriage posed by divorce and same-sex unions; and (4) the scientific and moral arguments marshalled against homosexual "marriage." The article concludes that, from a Catholic perspective, marriage must remain exclusive to one man and one woman, grounded not merely in religious conviction but in demonstrable social science evidence. Implications for public policy, family law, and pastoral care are discussed.

Keywords: homosexuality, same-sex marriage, Catholic Social Teaching, Natural Law, Heterosexual Marriage, Family, Public Health, Procreation

Introduction

The debate surrounding same-sex marriage occupies a prominent place in contemporary discussions of law, ethics, religion, and social policy. At the heart of this debate lies a fundamental question: What is the nature and purpose of marriage as a social institution, and who has the right to access it? The Catholic Church, one of the oldest and most influential religious institutions in the world, has consistently maintained that marriage is a sacred union between one man and one woman, established by God for the procreation of children and the mutual sanctification of spouses. As the account of Genesis shows, marriage and sexuality were created by God and given to mankind as gifts for our benefit. Scripture records God's statement that "it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). As a result, "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Marriage is a conduit through which God's grace flows to the couple and their children. The Catholic Church understands marriage between a baptized man and woman to be a sacrament, a visible sign of the grace that God gives them to help them live their lives here and now to be able to join him in eternity.

In recent decades, however, the legalization of same-sex marriage in numerous jurisdictions has challenged traditional definitions of marriage and prompted vigorous responses from religious communities, ethicists, legal scholars, and social scientists. This article situates itself within that contested terrain, offering a systematic analysis of the Catholic position as articulated in official Church documents and supplemented by empirical social-scientific literature.

This study focuses on the Catholic Church's teachings on marriage and homosexuality, drawing from official Church documents such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, papal encyclicals, and relevant empirical studies in sociology, psychology, public health, and family studies. While the study examines these issues from a Catholic perspective, it does not attempt to represent all religious viewpoints. It also does not provide a detailed analysis of the legal or constitutional debates surrounding same-sex marriage, except where such discussions help to explain the wider social implications of the issue. The study is important because it presents a clear and evidence-based explanation of the traditional Catholic understanding of marriage in the context of ongoing contemporary debates. It combines theological insights with findings from the social sciences, making the discussion accessible to both academic and general audiences. In addition, it serves as a useful resource for pastoral ministers, educators, researchers, and policymakers. The study is further significant because of the social and health benefits often associated with stable marital relationships, including improved physical and mental well-being, greater longevity, and enhanced social stability.

Statement of the Problem

The growing movement to redefine marriage to include same-sex couples poses significant conceptual, theological, and social challenges. Proponents of same-sex marriage argue on grounds of equality, civil rights, and personal happiness. Opponents, including the Catholic Church, contend that such redefinition fundamentally misunderstands the nature of marriage and risks serious harm to individuals, families, and society. A persistent problem in public discourse is the tendency to reduce the opposition to same-sex marriage to religious dogma or irrational prejudice. The term homophobic refers to the fear of homosexuality, and homosexual activists often use this term to end rational discussion of the issue by accusing their opponents of having an irrational fear. This is unjust. One can disagree with and criticize a behaviour without fearing it. This article argues that the Catholic opposition to same-sex marriage rests on rational, evidence-based arguments that transcend purely religious considerations, and that a rigorous analysis of social-scientific evidence

supports the Church's position on the nature and benefits of heterosexual marriage. The problem, therefore, is twofold: first, the lack of nuanced engagement with the theological and empirical dimensions of the Catholic position; and second, the insufficient attention paid to the social, psychological, and public-health-related of weakening or redefining the institution of marriage.

Literature Review

The Concept of Marriage: Theological and Sacramental Perspectives

Marriage, in the Catholic theological tradition, is understood as a divinely instituted covenant between one man and one woman, ordered toward the procreation and education of children and the mutual sanctification of the spouses. This sacramental understanding distinguishes Catholic teaching from purely civil or contractual conceptions of marriage.

The Bible repeatedly compares the relationship between man and wife to that between God and Israel (cf. Hos. 9:1) or between Christ and his Church (cf. Eph. 5:21-32), underscoring that marriage is a holy vocation and a public institution essential to the health of society. Theologically, marital love is characterized by four essential qualities: exclusivity, permanence, unconditionality, and openness to new life. These qualities reflect the deep structure of human personhood and genuine self-giving love, as developed in Pope John Paul II's "Theology of the Body," which grounds them in the idea that sexual expression by its very nature implies a total and unconditional gift of self to the other.

The Concept of Heterosexual Marriage and Its Social Benefits

A substantial body of empirical literature documents the social, psychological, and health benefits of heterosexual marriage. Waite and Gallagher's comprehensive review concludes that married people are better off than single or divorced people across multiple dimensions of well-being, with the strength of the "marriage effect" increasing with marital quality. Morowitz's early observation that divorce is as hazardous to a man's health as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day has been corroborated by subsequent research. Unmarried women are 50 percent more likely to die in any given year than married women; unmarried men are five times more likely. Being unmarried shortens a man's life by ten full years. The psychological benefits are equally well documented: married people have a greater sense of life purpose, are happier, and less likely to become depressed than their unmarried counterparts.

The Concept of Homosexuality: Psychological, Health, and Relational Dimensions

The scientific literature on homosexuality presents a complex and, in several respects, troubling picture. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of diagnostic disorders. In retrospect, this decision appears to have been inspired by political pressure rather than medical evidence. Subsequent research has consistently shown that homosexuals of both sexes have significantly elevated rates of psychological distress, suicidality, substance abuse, and physical health problems compared to heterosexuals, with much higher rates of depression, domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse, anxiety, and dependency on psychiatric care. The physical health implications are equally serious, with life expectancy of homosexual men reduced significantly and elevated rates of cancer and sexually transmitted diseases well documented in the literature (Dean et al., 2000; Lehmann et al., 1998).

With respect to relational stability, exclusive, permanent relationships are far less common among homosexuals than among heterosexuals. Even advocates of same-sex marriage such as Andrew Sullivan, have admitted that for them, "fidelity" does not mean complete monogamy, but just somewhat restrained promiscuity. Without exclusiveness, their "marriages" will have little meaning.

A critical distinction in this discourse is that between homosexual orientation and homosexual marriage as a legal institution. Adidi (2020) argues that these two concepts are “often treated as identical in public discourse and legislation” when they should be carefully distinguished. Writing specifically within the Nigerian context, Adidi contends that the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014 “focuses on prohibiting public expressions of same-sex unions rather than addressing broader questions surrounding sexuality, orientation, and human development.” He further raises the question of whether individuals should be penalized for sexual orientation when no marriage ceremony is involved, pointing to cases of arrests of alleged homosexuals that lacked a clear legal basis under the Act. This distinction between orientation and institution is pertinent to the present analysis: opposition to same-sex marriage as an institution need not entail the criminalization of homosexual persons as individuals.

The Concept of Same-Sex Marriage: Legal, Social, and Ethical Dimensions

The debate over the legalization of same-sex marriage extends well beyond the question of individual rights. While proponents argue that denying same-sex couples the right to marry constitutes unjust discrimination, the Catholic Church maintains that recognizing homosexual unions as marriages would misrepresent the nature of marriage and harm society, even as it insists that homosexual persons must be treated with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.

Stanley Kurtz of the Hudson Institute has documented that the goal of radical homosexual activists is not to achieve domestic equality with heterosexuals or social respectability, but rather to empty the institution of marriage of its meaning. Once the definition of marriage is detached from its biological and anthropological foundations, there is no principled limit to the combinations that could be recognized, and no limit to the possible damage to the common good.

Theoretical Framework

This article is grounded in two interrelated theoretical frameworks: natural law theory and Catholic social teaching. Natural law theory holds that the moral order is inscribed in human nature and can be apprehended through reason, making marriage a natural institution whose essential features, exclusivity, permanence, unconditionality, and openness to new life are grounded in human nature and the common good. Catholic social teaching, articulated in papal encyclicals and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, emphasizes the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society, and the responsibility of the state to promote the common good. From this perspective, the regulation of marriage is a public concern of the highest importance. The application of natural law theory to the question of same-sex marriage proceeds through several steps.

First, it identifies the essential purposes of marriage as procreation, spousal unity, and the education of children as constitutive of its nature. Secondly, it argues that same-sex unions are structurally incapable of fulfilling these purposes, not merely as a matter of contingent fact but as a matter of biological and anthropological necessity. Third, it draws on empirical evidence to support the claim that the social benefits of marriage are tied to its essential features, including sexual complementarity. Fourth, it concludes that the legalization of same-sex marriage would undermine the institution of marriage and harm the common good. The theoretical framework also draws on the philosophical anthropology of Nicholas Berdyaev, who argued that neither a man by himself nor a woman by herself is biologically completely human; each lacks the perfections of the opposite sex and is, in that sense, incomplete without the other, providing a philosophical grounding for the insistence on sexual complementarity in genuine human union.

Methodology

Research Design

This article employs a qualitative, analytical research design based on systematic document analysis and critical literature review. Primary sources include official Catholic Church documents, the Catechism, *Humanae Vitae*, and writings of Pope John Paul II, alongside peer-reviewed empirical studies in sociology, psychology, public health, and family science. The aim is to synthesize and critically evaluate existing evidence within a coherent theoretical framework, adopting a critical realist epistemology that treats empirical evidence as yielding genuine knowledge about the social and moral dimensions of marriage. Source selection was guided by representativeness, engaging the most significant studies on marriage's health and social benefits, psychological outcomes associated with homosexuality, effects of divorce on children, and relational patterns in homosexual relationships. Where evidence is contested or ambiguous, this is acknowledged. The article also employs the comparative method, examining differential outcomes associated with heterosexual marriage, cohabitation, same-sex relationships, and single parenthood, providing a stronger empirical basis for evaluating the claims of both proponents and opponents of same-sex marriage.

Research Questions

This paper is structured around the following research questions:

1. What is the theological basis for the Catholic Church's understanding of marriage and human sexuality?
2. What does the empirical evidence reveal about the health, psychological, and social benefits of heterosexual marriage?
3. What social-scientific evidence exists regarding homosexuality and the capacity of same-sex relationships to fulfil the essential requirements of marriage?
4. How might the legalization of same-sex marriage affect the institution of heterosexual marriage, the divorce rate, and the well-being of children?
5. What are the implications of this analysis for public policy, family law, and pastoral care?

Objectives of the Study

This study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the theological and sacramental foundations of marriage as articulated in Catholic teaching.
2. To review and evaluate the empirical evidence regarding the health, psychological, and social benefits of heterosexual marriage.
3. To analyze the social-scientific evidence on homosexuality, including psychological, health-related, and relational outcomes.
4. To assess the potential social consequences of legalizing same-sex marriage, with particular reference to the institution of heterosexual marriage and the well-being of children.
5. To present a coherent, evidence-informed argument in support of the traditional definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the Catholic theological and social-scientific arguments about marriage and homosexuality. It draws on official Catholic Church documents, including the Catechism of the Catholic Church and papal encyclicals, as well as peer-reviewed empirical studies in sociology, psychology, public health, and family science. The article does not claim to represent all religious perspectives on this issue, nor does it engage in depth with the legal or constitutional dimensions of same-sex marriage litigation, except insofar as they illuminate the broader social stakes of the debate. The study is primarily analytical and argumentative in nature, synthesizing existing literature to advance a coherent position consistent with Catholic social teaching. It acknowledges

the sensitivity of the subject and seeks to engage with the evidence in a spirit of intellectual honesty and pastoral compassion.

Significance of the Study

This article makes several significant contributions to the existing literature. First, it offers a systematic and evidence-based defense of the traditional Catholic understanding of marriage at a time when that understanding is widely contested. Second, it brings together theological reflection and empirical social science in a manner that is accessible to both academic and general audiences. Third, it provides a resource for pastoral workers, educators, policymakers, and others who engage with questions of family, marriage, and human sexuality in professional or civic contexts. The significance of the study also lies in its public health implications. Marriage, unlike cohabitation, makes people richer and healthier. Married people are better off than single or divorced people, and the better the marriage, the stronger the “marriage effect” on physical and mental health, longevity, and prosperity. Understanding and defending the institution of marriage is, therefore, not merely a religious or ethical concern but a matter of public health and social policy of the highest importance.

Discussion

The Health and Social Benefits of Heterosexual Marriage

The empirical evidence reviewed in this article strongly supports the conclusion that heterosexual marriage confers significant and measurable benefits on individuals and society. Married people are healthier, happier, longer-lived, and more financially secure than their unmarried counterparts. These benefits are not merely a reflection of pre-existing personal advantages; studies consistently show that marriage itself improves people’s health. Sick people who got married got healthier. Healthy people who are married got healthier still. The health benefits of marriage operate through multiple mechanisms. On the trivial end, single men do stupid things: they drink too much, take drugs, get into fights, drive when drunk, and take unnecessary risks, and when they marry, they do fewer stupid things. Another factor is having a spouse who monitors their health. But the biggest reason for the health advantage of marriage is the emotional satisfaction of a happy and fulfilling marriage. Studies consistently show that as marital happiness increases, so do objective measurements of health and longevity for both husbands and wives. The psychological benefits of marriage are equally well documented. Married people have a greater sense of life purpose and are less likely to become depressed. Married people have sex considerably more often than single people do, and they enjoy it more. Studies consistently show that both married men and married women enjoy sex much more than single people do. Men and women both value commitment in intimate relationships, and it is commitment that produces the deepest satisfaction.

These findings have important implications for public policy. If healthy citizens are far more likely to be produced by intact marriages than by broken ones, then the state has a compelling interest in protecting and promoting the institution of marriage. The exploding divorce rate since “no-fault” divorce laws were introduced demonstrates how important external factors are in keeping couples together, and how serious the consequences are when those external factors are weakened.

The Importance of Sexual Complementarity

The evidence reviewed in this article supports the conclusion that sexual complementarity between a man and a woman is necessary for the deepest forms of human union. The Russian existentialist philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev tried to explain the need for sexual complementarities by saying that loneliness is part of the human condition and that loneliness occurs because, deep down, we all realize that neither a man by himself nor a woman by himself is biologically completely human. Each lacks the perfections and capabilities of the opposite sex, and in that sense, each is incomplete and lonely without the other.

Men and women are different and, in many ways, complementary. The differences between men and women are obvious to all but the most ideologically blinded deconstructionists. Men and women have been found by psychologists in every culture to differ in aggression and general activity level, types of cognitive strength, sensory sensitivity, and sexual behavior. These differences matter both spiritually and physically, for without the complementarities between a man and a woman on all these levels, the deepest forms of union are not possible. The social science evidence also supports the conclusion that children benefit from being raised by both their biological parents. Men and women parent differently, and children need both. Mothers tend to emphasize the emotional security of their children, while fathers tend to stress competition and risk-taking. Mothers tend to seek the immediate well-being of the child, while fathers tend to foster long-term autonomy and independence. Children need both parents because they learn different lessons from each. Neither fathers nor mothers are expendable.

Homosexuality, Same-Sex Relationships, and the Conditions for Marriage

The evidence reviewed in this article raises serious questions about the capacity of homosexual relationships to fulfill the essential conditions of marriage. Without exclusivity, permanent and unconditional relationships will not happen, either. By definition, a relationship that allows for “cruising” will be shallow and mutually exploitative, just as sex with strangers is shallow and mutually exploitative. The available evidence suggests that same-sex relationships are, on average, less exclusive, less stable, and less conducive to the well-being of the partners than heterosexual marriages. The argument that legalizing same-sex marriage would extend the health and social benefits of marriage to homosexual couples rests on the assumption that those benefits are independent of the specific features of heterosexual marriage, including sexual complementarity and openness to new life. This assumption is not supported by the evidence. No data is showing similar benefits for same-sex couples. We don’t know whether same-sex couples would enjoy any of these benefits, and there are reasons to think they would not.

Furthermore, the legalization of same-sex marriage poses a risk to the institution of heterosexual marriage. One of the downsides to redefining marriage to include same-sex couples would be the weakening of the meaning of marriage, which would cause more divorces. Human nature being what it is, if the meaning of marriage is weakened, it will be psychologically easier for even more people to divorce. The evidence from the introduction of no-fault divorce is instructive: when the stigma of divorce was reduced, the divorce rate skyrocketed.

The Well-Being of Children

The evidence on the well-being of children raised in different family structures is unambiguous: children raised by both biological parents in a stable, committed marriage fare significantly better on virtually every measure of well-being than children raised in other family structures. Children of happy marriages are statistically much healthier, physically and mentally, than the children of divorced parents or the children of single parents who were never married.

Even being born into an unhappy marriage is generally better than growing up in a broken home. The myth that “a happy divorce is better for children than an unhappy marriage” has been proven false overwhelmingly. Children don’t care much about the quality of Mom and Dad’s emotional life; they just want Mom and Dad to be there, and if one of them (usually Dad) goes, his departure never stops hurting, and it never stops generating painful consequences. With respect to children raised by same-sex couples, the available evidence is limited but worrisome. We know that children raised in families containing one non-biological parent are dozens of times more likely to be abused than children raised by both biological parents. Children raised by homosexual partners appear in some studies to suffer from sex-role confusion. These findings are not definitive, but they counsel

caution in making legal and social changes that could expose large numbers of children to untested family arrangements.

Conclusion

This work has examined the Catholic Church's theological and social-scientific arguments concerning marriage, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage. The evidence reviewed supports the following conclusions.

First, heterosexual marriage, when it is exclusive, permanent, unconditional, and open to new life, confers significant and measurable benefits on individuals, families, and society. These benefits are not incidental features of marriage but are tied to its essential nature, including its sexual complementarity and its orientation toward the procreation and education of children.

Secondly, the available evidence on homosexuality and same-sex relationships raises serious questions about the capacity of such relationships to fulfill the essential conditions of marriage. The loneliness and short lives of homosexuals are not because same-sex marriage is illegal. They are inherent in the homosexual lifestyle itself. Homosexuality doesn't satisfy; sexually satisfied people don't seek random sex with hundreds of strangers.

Thirdly, the legalization of same-sex marriage poses real risks to the institution of heterosexual marriage, to the well-being of children, and to the common good. Society has a lot to lose from legalizing homosexual marriage. And homosexuals have nothing to gain.

Fourth, the opposition to same-sex marriage does not require religious dogma or irrational prejudice. Rational analysis yields solid, objective reasons for limiting marriage to one man and one woman that anyone can agree with on purely secular grounds.

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

- i. Policymakers should resist pressure to redefine marriage in ways that sever it from its biological and anthropological foundations. The institution of marriage is precious and contributes to the happiness and prosperity of society. Marriage must, therefore, remain limited to one man and one woman who strive to keep their marriage exclusive, unconditional, permanent, and life-giving.
- ii. Public health authorities should recognize the health benefits of stable heterosexual marriage and develop policies that support and strengthen the institution, including measures to reduce the divorce rate and promote marital stability.
- iii. Pastoral workers and educators should engage with the question of homosexuality in a spirit of genuine compassion and intellectual honesty, acknowledging the real suffering experienced by many homosexual persons while maintaining the truth about the nature of marriage and human sexuality. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that homosexual persons must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.
- iv. Further research is needed on the outcomes for children raised by same-sex couples, on the relational stability of same-sex relationships, and on the social consequences of same-sex marriage legislation in jurisdictions where it has been enacted.
- V. The broader cultural conversation about marriage should be informed by both theological wisdom and rigorous empirical evidence, and should resist the tendency to reduce the debate to questions of private preference or civil rights, to the exclusion of the public health and social dimensions of the issue. This position is echoed by Adidi (2020), who concludes that "policymakers should focus more on research, education, and preventive measures rather than relying solely on criminal sanctions." Specifically, Adidi recommends comprehensive

education on human sexuality at all levels of schooling, strengthening guidance and counseling services in educational institutions, greater parental involvement in children's moral and social development, and religious education and spiritual formation as part of character development. These constructive, preventive measures align with the Catholic commitment to pastoral care, education, and the promotion of authentic human flourishing.

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