The catholic church's views on same-sex marriage

Family, Same Sex Marriage

The 11th Commandment: No Homo, Bro

The Catholic Church (“ The Church”) is the largest Christian church and is one of the oldest religions in the world. The Church is headed by the Pope, also known as the Bishop of Rome. The Catholic Church believes that it is the one true religion as dictated by Jesus Christ himself. One of the most controversial issues right now between The Church and secular society is the topic of gay marriage. The Church stands against the motion to make gay marriage legal and stands as one of the major blockades in legalizing gay marriage in all fifty states, along with other Christian denominations. The Church may be opposed to homosexual relations; however, due to various definitions of marriage and numerous different ways of interpreting the Bible, The Church’s stance on gay marriage is quickly losing support from much of the Catholic population on this issue with 60% of Catholics supporting the movement for same-sex marriage.

If you were to ask someone on the street how they would define marriage, he or she might say that marriage is between two people who love each other, specifically a heterosexual couple. He or she probably has found this definition through their church or religious beliefs, especially if this person is Catholic. However, what many Catholics don’t realize is that the definition of marriage in the Bible varies in different sections of the Bible. Marriage is defined eight different ways in the Bible.

One way marriage is defined in the Bible is as the Nuclear Family. This is the version of marriage that most Catholics have come to recognize as the only viable marriage. Genesis 2: 18-24 describes the Nuclear Family, “ That is

why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” These verses detail why God made Eve, Adam’s companion, so that he would not be alone. This verse uses very powerful imagery to describe the union between the couple. Eve is made from one of Adam’s ribs, symbolizing that they are one person, that man and woman are one. One of the many arguments used against homosexuality is “ Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” This is to say that God made woman to be man’s companion, not just another man. The Nuclear Family is also supported by the Catholic Church because heterosexual couples can reproduce. Reproduction is viewed as sacred and natural. Reproduction is important to keeping the human race and Catholic tradition alive. Since homosexual couples cannot reproduce, their union is viewed as unnatural.

The second way marriage is defined in the Bible is as a man, his wives, and his concubines. Abraham is known in the Catholic Church as “ the father of Faith. (does the “ F” inf “ Faith” need to be cap?)” He puts all of his trust in his God and is regarded among the saints. Abraham is a man who had two concubines. A concubine is a woman who lives with a man but is not as important as his wives. Most of the time, concubines were slaves, a bounty from a conquest or part of his primary wife’s dowry. These women added to the man’s reputation because two wives gave him a better chance of having many children. Concubines were essentially sexual servants. Abraham was not the only man in the Bible to have concubines. Solomon is another important figure in the Bible who had multiple women in his life, “ And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart” (1 Kings 11: 3). Men like Solomon and

Abraham were highly regarded in society because of their financial stability to be able to support the multiple women in their lives.

Polygamy is another way marriage is defined in the bible. Polygamy is a marriage that has two or more partners. Polygyny is when a man is married to more than one woman; that is the most common form of polygamy and the only form of accepted polygamy in the Bible. Polygamy is now illegal in most developed countries under the bigamy laws. Bigamy is when one enters into a marriage while already legally married to another person. The second marriage is usually considered void. Many religious people find polygamy to be a lustful practice and thus is condemned. Kody Brown, a famous polygamist, said that, “ Love should be multiplied, not divided.” Polygamists argue that having multiple marriages allows them to love more deeply and spread love by sharing it with their wives and children. Catholics condemn polygamy because “ polygamy is contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive” (Catholic Church 1645).

A fourth way marriage is defined is a man, a wife, and the wife’s property. Genesis 16: 1-2 illustrates an example of how this arrangement would work, “ Abram’s wife Sarai had borne him no children. Now she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. Sarai said to Abram: ‘ The Lord has kept me from bearing children. Have intercourse with my maid; perhaps I will have sons through her.’ Abram obeyed Sarai.” In this case, the woman in question is not the mother of the child borne to her. The child Hagar gives birth to is actually to be given to Sarai in a similar fashion in which was described in the novel, The Handmaid’s Tale by Margaret Atwood.

A Levirate marriage is the fifth way marriage is defined in the bible. A Levirate marriage is when a man dies and his brother is obligated to marry his brother's widow if they have not had any children together. The firstborn child is then considered the dead man's heir. This method of creating a lineage, along with the method described in the previous paragraph are no longer practiced because with today's genetics and scientific advances, we now know that the child born to that father would not be " legitimate."

As horrific as it may seem in today's day and age, the sixth way marriage is defined in the Bible is as a rapist and his victim. " If a man comes upon a young woman, a virgin who is not betrothed, seizes her and lies with her, and they are discovered, the man who lay with her shall give the young woman's father fifty silver shekels and she will be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her as long as he lives" (Deuteronomy 22: 28-29). Initially, I thought that there were no exceptions to this rule. However, after some research, I found out that the final word on whether or not the rapist and his victim get married comes from her father. The father can choose not to give his daughter to the rapist and simply take the fifty silver shekel fine. So, the rapist may be stuck having to hand over the money but not get a wife. Another interesting point found in my research is that the victim may have actually wanted to marry her rapist due to the importance placed on her virginity. In today's society, no one would ever dream of having a woman marry her rapist. It is a serious crime against a person, not a piece of property which is how women were viewed in biblical times.

The seventh form of marriage in the Bible is a male soldier and a prisoner of war. If a male soldier saw a woman that he liked during a raid of another village, he could take her as his wife. “ If you see a beautiful woman among the captives and become so enamored of her that you wish to have her as a wife, and so you take her home to your house, she must shave her head, cut her nails, lay aside her captive’s garb, and stay in your house, mourning her father and mother for a full month. After that, you may come to her, and you shall be her husband and she shall be your wife. If later on you lose your liking for her, you shall give her freedom, if she wishes it; you must not sell her for money. Do not enslave her, since you have violated her” (Deuteronomy 21: 11-14). Numbers 31: 1-18 also mentions this practice. This passage explains how to proceed with taking the prisoner of war as a wife and actually gives her many rights that women did not have at the time, such as getting accustomed to her new home and making sure that the soldier actually wants to marry her. It also ensures that if he does get bored with her after he marries her, that she must be given freedom and not sold into slavery.

The eighth and final form of marriage in the bible is between a male slave and a female slave. Exodus 21: 4 describes the way in which the version of marriage and family is executed, “ But if his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children belong to her master and the man shall leave alone.” The verses before this one are explaining slave laws. This verse in particular is saying that if the slave hasn’t come with a wife and the master gives the slave a wife, then the wife and their children belong to the master even when the slave is free after the

six-year period. This form of marriage is obviously now outdated because slavery is illegal in the United States and other developed countries.

Marriage in the modern age has begun to take on different meanings. More and more people accept that marriage should be between two people who love each other and are committed to one another; not necessarily a heterosexual couple, but any combination on the gender spectrum. Many couples are also now marrying just for the legal benefits marriage provides.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the summary of the beliefs of the Church defines marriage as, “ The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (Catholic Church 1601). This highlights the four things most important to Catholics regarding marriage. The marriage must be heterosexual, it must be for life, having children and must be between two Catholics.

Interfaith relationships can occur within the Catholic faith. A dispensation is required for the marriage to take place. In canon law, a dispensation is the exemption from canon law in specific cases. The couple also must promise to try to raise their children in the Catholic faith and the Catholic partner must state that they are going to stay within the faith. With dispensations, the Church is breaking its own rules on marriage. Allowing annulments when a couple gets divorced is another way the Church gets around its own laws.

The secular definition of marriage can be found in a dictionary. Merriam-Webster gives three definitions for marriage: 1) the relationship that exists between a husband and wife; 2) a similar relationship between people of the same sex; 3) a ceremony in which two people are married. These three definitions include all sexual orientations and are very broad, unlike the Church canon. The definitions of marriage, sexual orientation, and family life are flexible and ever-changing. It is hard to define any of these.

There are several verses that mention homosexual relations in the Bible. The first passage mentioning homosexual activity is Genesis 19. Genesis 19 describes the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this story, the Lord sent two angels to see the evilness happening in the two cities. God wanted to destroy the cities, but Abraham began to negotiate with Him. God eventually agreed to spare the cities if there were merely ten righteous people within the cities. The angels then went to spend the night posing as travelers in the home of Abraham’s nephew, Lot. Then all of the men in the city surrounded Lot’s house and demanded that the visitors be handed over so that they could rape them. Lot offered the men his daughters instead, but they would not accept that and tried to charge the door. The angels blinded the men. Lot and his family were able to flee as the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

For years, this passage has been used to condemn homosexual relations because it has been interpreted that the cities were destroyed because homosexual relations had been occurring. But, the only type of homosexual relations in the passage is a threatened gang rape. Ezekiel 16: 49 clarifies

the reason Sodom was destroyed, “ Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.” This verse says nothing about engaging in homosexual relations, but condemns the people who resided in the city for gluttony, pride, sloth and greed–four of the seven deadly sins. The cities were struck down by the Lord for the rampant practice of the seven deadly sins, not homosexual behavior.

The next two verses about homosexuality appear in Leviticus and are similar to each other. Leviticus 18: 22 states that, “ You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such thing is an abomination.” Similarly, Leviticus 20: 13 says, “ If a man lies with a male as with a woman, they have committed an abomination; the two of them shall be put to death; their bloodguilt is upon them.” There are several problems with citing these verses when arguing against homosexuality. First is the way these verses are interpreted; they can be taken literally as condemning homosexual acts. Another way to interpret these verse is in a less literal sense. In this case, the verses would prohibit men treating other men like they treat women, not necessarily in a sexual manner. We also must take into context the book of the Bible in which these laws were written. Leviticus contains many laws such as mixing fabrics in clothing (Leviticus 19: 19), trimming your beard or cutting your hair (Leviticus19: 27), or getting tattoos (Leviticus 19: 28). Those are just some of the examples of outdated laws featured in this book. The second reason these verses are invalid is found in two verses from the New Testament. Hebrews 8: 13 states that the “ old law is obsolete and outdated and will soon disappear.” Romans 10: 4 adds to that saying that “ Christ is the end of

the law." These two verses are the reason that Catholics no longer follow the laws written in the Old Testament.

However, the issue of homosexual relations still appears in the New Testament, although, Jesus himself never says anything on the topic. To Jesus, a good person had to love God and his neighbor (Mark 12: 29-31). His followers still want to discriminate against people who aren't like themselves and use passages from Romans 1: 26-27, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10 and 1 Timothy 1: 10 as foundation for their arguments.

" For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error" (Romans 1: 26-27). The behavior condemned in this passage is lust; Paul makes no mention of love, commitment or faithfulness. His description of same-sex behavior is based on excess sexual relations and lust. In the ancient world, homosexual relations mainly occurred between young boys and their masters or through boy prostitution. The masters were often married to women. So, in that way, same sex behavior was just considered a lustful act, which is one of the seven deadly sins.

Religious views and interpretations of the Bible change over time and with the changes in society. There are many different translations of the Bible, and many times, translating one word differently can change the entire meaning of the passage being read. The Bible never condemns acts of love

and commitment, just acts of lust and gluttony. In this day and age in America, religion is not as prevalent as it was in previous ages and nor as it is in more underdeveloped countries. In our society, the definition of marriage is more broad and inclusive as compared with the old ways of thinking demonstrated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. As stated earlier, many lay Catholics support same-sex marriage and believe that the Church should be using its resources to help the poor and needy, something Jesus actually commanded. So keeping in mind the various definitions of marriage that occur in the Bible, the various interpretations of Biblical verses, and the changing society as a whole, the Church should no longer condemn homosexuality and step back from the argument.