

**Quadrant Online 14 January 2025**

**Copyright © 2025 Michael Giffin**

**3000 words**

## **Can The Church Bless Moral Disorder?**

It is useful to compare the inverse results of the 2017 plebiscite on same-sex marriage (61% Yes) with the 2023 referendum on the voice (60% No). Both were attempts by progressive elites to remake society in their image. One was a plebiscite on whether homosexual and homosexual relationships were functionally equivalent, the other a referendum on whether indigenous Australians should be represented by an additional layer of bureaucracy enshrined in the constitution. Why did voters accept one and not the other?

While homosexual relationships and indigenous issues are different, public acceptance of homosexuality is downstream from medical advances. It is unlikely a Yes vote in the 2017 plebiscite would have succeeded without cures or treatments for the consequences of male-to-male sex. Public Health authorities who monitor notifiable diseases know men-who-have-sex-with-men have significantly higher rates of sexually transmissible infections than those who do not.

This is objective scientific fact not subjective moral judgment. If the invention of antibiotics, antiretrovirals, and vaccines means sexual diseases are no longer moral issues, what kind of issues are they? What is the difference between the moral panic about AIDS and the public alarm about COVID-19 before the arrival of treatments for both?

The human genome has been mapped and there is no “gay” gene, so it has yet to be established whether homosexuality is a hard-wired fact of evolution and the Chesterton fence separating it from heterosexuality can be removed with a clear conscience. The fence has been

removed anyway in liberal democracies without meaningful consideration as to why it existed for most of human history, or the real consequences of removing it.

The only established fact about homosexuality, from an evolutionary perspective, is that lesbians and gay men are both attracted to individuals of the same sex, and the differences between them, in terms of their evolutionary origins and how their relationships tend to play out, are both large and consistent with the differences between heterosexual women and men. Female homosexuality cannot be separated from female evolution (being a woman, having a female sexuality). Male homosexuality cannot be separated from male evolution (being a man, having a male sexuality). Despite these deviations from the evolutionary mean, heterosexuality is the norm, is normal in a way homosexuality is not.

In the contemporary Anglosphere, all concepts of normal, however derived or intuited, are anathema to those who see humans as blank slates, raw material independent of human biology, human evolution (natural selection), human nature, or the biosphere as “mother nature”. Anything less than believing humans are free to choose to be whatever they want to be is now regarded as conservative or religious prejudice. Until recently, it was assumed that “what is” in nature is “what ought to be”, but this is now regarded as fallacious, a naturalistic fallacy, an appeal-to-nature fallacy. We have lost our concept of “normal” because we have lost our concept of “nature”.

Is human freedom circumscribed by nature? This question needs to be revisited because advances in science and technology have overtaken our capacity to understand and govern them. Liberal democracies are still managing the consequences of the sexual revolution, the big lie—firmly entrenched in progressive

politics and policies, driven by Cultural Marxism, protected by the human rights industry—that anyone can do anything, sexually, with no negative consequences for individuals or their society.

UNTIL relatively recently, human procreation depended on an egg (a female gamete), a sperm (a male gamete), a womb, and two parents (female and male). This was once scientific fact, existential reality, religious truth, the foundation of human society, the subtext of every grand narrative. In the postmodern world, grand narratives are suspect and all canonical accounts of what human life is and means are now thought to be narrow-minded.

Evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology are grand narratives, like Judaism and Christianity, although their truth claims are thought to be scientific rather than religious. Evolutionary biologists believe the main driver in human evolution is sexual selection. The evidence suggests the essential mechanism here is hypergamy, a woman's desire to marry as high up the social hierarchy as she can, with an eye towards her partner's status and education. They believe her mating choices are important because she cannot reproduce on her own, offspring are a costly investment, and she needs a man with resources (or the potential to create and provide them).

This is no longer so. Women are told they no longer need men, for anything at all, which is true in theory but false in practice. And when the Anglosphere allowed same-sex couples the right to marry and have children, it did so without serious debate about the normative role biological parents (fathers and mothers) play in human procreation, and in the lives of their biological children (sons and daughters). Whatever passed for debate was framed as human rights rather than human responsibilities (or biological imperatives) while chanting

the mindless mantra Love-is-Love. To stray from the progressive script was to be accused of hate speech and be regarded as unworthy of belonging to liberal democratic society.

In lesbian studies there is a body of qualitative research, increasingly accepted within the mainstream of scientific literature, which studiously ignores the fact that two women cannot reproduce without sperm (a male gamete). Curiously, it is considered reactionary and unscientific to question the ethics or morality of how lesbian couples obtain sperm, what method they use to fertilise the egg—IVF or turkey-baster—or whether the donor has a moral/legal right to be identified as the biological father (as he has in some jurisdictions). Political correctness protects lesbians from unwanted scrutiny of their private lives, until they do something to attract unwanted attention. Think of the high-profile lesbian parents of IVF children accused of bullying for political reasons—mean girls accusing their heterosexual female competitors of being childless—or the lesbian couples suing fertility clinics for sexual discrimination because the designer embryos they ordered turned out to be not what they wanted.

Over in the gaslighting media, there are attempts to promote a fashionable hyper-novelty—a legal fiction—that two men can give birth. Think of the high-profile male couples proudly announcing the arrival of their “biological” children by surrogacy, as if there are no moral issues surrounding surrogacy. The role of the birth mother (the surrogate) in these pregnancies is not discussed, is kept hidden, lest the gaslighting narratives around them evaporate or attract unwanted scrutiny.

Among them are male couples who claim to be observant Jews and male couples who claim to be practising Christians. If mosque-going male couples expecting “biological” children via surrogacy tend to be

thin on the ground, the brave new world of progressive elites anxiously awaits their arrival. We are being habituated to the contrived optics of happy, well-adjusted family that just so happens to be homosexual, all of which are ideological artefacts, none of which could occur naturally (in nature, the biosphere).

ACCORDING to the 1965 Vatican II document *Dignitatis Humanae* (On the Dignity of the Human Person):

[Man] must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.

This official teaching is colloquially called “primacy of conscience”.

How is conscience formed? In the West, this was traditionally a matter of an individual’s confessional relationship with Christianity—Protestant or Catholic—the common denominator being Christ: who he is, what he does, what he requires. For Protestants, the Bible is the supreme authority about Christ. For Catholics, the authority of the Bible is bolstered by the Church’s teaching about faith and morals—the Magisterium—guarded by the collegiality of the Bishops and the Papacy.

Traditionally, Catholic social teaching incorporates natural law theory, a version of Scholasticism developed by Aquinas, which begins with the Aristotelian notion that the human person has a natural teleological function. According to Aquinas, we are given reason to reflect on our human nature, which allows us to discover our specific and general ends—our *telos*—in addition to the Bible. Once these ends are discovered, it is then possible for us to determine the moral means of achieving them. This Scholastic version of natural law—Thomism—is a way of understanding God’s plan for us, built into our nature by the act of creation itself.

With the arrival of Modernity, Thomism was

challenged on several fronts: existentialism's quarrel with essentialism, the rise of dialectical materialism, Cultural Marxism's immanent critique of transcendence and reason. Any uses of the terms nature or natural are now problematic, particularly in relation to human nature and morality. Those who wish to be thought "scientific" avoid the naturalistic fallacy: the idea that "what is" in nature is "what ought to be".

The formation of conscience now occurs in a culture where promoting the idea that heteronormativity is natural—that men and women are complementary, made for each other, whether through evolutionary biology or the biblical idea of *Imago Dei*—is now illegal. In Australia, Christians do not have a right under the law to explain magisterial Church teachings, publicly, as Bishop Porteus discovered on distributing a booklet "Don't Mess With Marriage" to parents of children in Tasmania's Catholic schools.

The message for Christians is clear: conscience is now formed in a culture determined to suppress any concept of human telos deduced from human biology and intuited from the Bible supported by natural law. So the cost of Christian discipleship is greater now than it was just a few years ago. Despite this, the Church does not exist to syncretize the lies of the culture. Its mission is countercultural. Progressive Christians attempt to interpret the Gospel as a manifesto for progressive sociology. They seek to construct a liberationist Jesus as a solution to whatever the cultural Left think ails the body politic. They assume if they obey Christ's summary of the law (Matthew 22.37–39)—to love their God above all else, to love their neighbour as themselves—they do everything God requires of them, but that obedience is the beginning of discipleship not the end.

The apostolic mantle is about the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine, consistent with the

teachings of the Bible and the commands of Christ. The Magisterium took two millennia to create. Destroying it can be accomplished quickly.

IN July 1975, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, wrote to Paul VI to inform him “of the slow but steady growth of a consensus of opinion within the Anglican Communion that there are no fundamental objections in principle to the ordination of women to the priesthood”. The archbishop continued: “we are aware that action on this matter could be an obstacle to further progress along the path of unity Christ wills for his Church. The central authorities of the Anglican Communion have therefore called for common counsel on this matter.”

Paul VI’s reply of November 1975 noted that the Joint Commission of the two Churches, which had been meeting since 1966, was charged with issuing a Final Report. “We must regretfully recognize that a new course taken by the Anglican Communion in admitting women to the ordained priesthood cannot fail to introduce into this dialogue an element of grave difficulty which those involved will have to take seriously into account.”

The subsequent ordination of women in some Anglican provinces forced John Paul II to issue an Apostolic Letter in May 1994, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, so “all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance”, which is, “the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women”. At the time there was debate among academics about the letter’s *ex cathedra* status, which amounted to little more than questioning the Pope’s wisdom for saying what they did not want to hear. In a *responsum ad dubium* (reply to a doubt) of October 1995, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared that *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* had been “set forth infallibly by the ordinary and

universal Magisterium” and is “to be held definitively, as belonging to the deposit of faith”.

Nevertheless, Paul VI’s response to Donald Coggan in 1975 was optimistic:

Obstacles do not destroy mutual commitment to a search for reconciliation. We learn with satisfaction of a first informal discussion of the question between Anglican representatives and those of our Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity ... It is our hope that this beginning may lead to further common counsel and growth of understanding.

These discussions were conducted at arms-length by the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). Over the years, ARCIC produced official statements on eucharistic doctrine, ordination, church authority, the doctrine of salvation, the nature of communion between the churches, and the role of Mary in the Church. Although ARCIC had just completed a major document on Marian theology, the Vatican abruptly suspended discussions in 2003 after The Episcopal Church (TEC) consecrated a practising homosexual as bishop, Gene Robinson, who then married his husband in 2008.

Robinson’s consecration was presented as a social justice issue, a hill on which TEC willingly chose to exhaust its moral capital. When Robinson divorced his husband in 2014, many were left scratching their heads, given that TEC’s dogged pursuit of Feminist and LGBTQ+ agendas was tearing Anglicanism apart. Since then the broader Anglican Communion has been torn asunder by the push to mainstream homosexuality, which in effect means Anglicanism now believes there is no functional difference between the reproductive system and the digestive tract. They are interchangeable.

Pope Francis dipped his toe into these waters when he made his “Who am I to judge?” comment about homosexuals, and his subsequent observation about homosexuals being children of God with a right to a



family. Ultimately, the answer was settled in March 2021, when the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith issued a *responsum ad dubium* to the question: Does the Church have the power to bless homosexual unions? The answer is No.

The *responsum* begins by admitting calls for such blessings can often represent a sincere desire to welcome and accompany homosexual persons along the paths of faith, “so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives”. It proceeds by explaining that when any human relationship is blessed: “in addition to the right intention of those who participate, it is necessary that what is blessed be objectively and positively ordered to receive and express grace, according to the designs of God inscribed in creation, and fully revealed by Christ the Lord”.

It is not licit to bless relationships, even stable ones, which involve sexual activity outside marriage, as “the indissoluble union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life”. The presence of positive elements in homosexual relationships does not make those relationships the legitimate objects of ecclesial blessing, “since the positive elements exist within the context of a union not ordered to the Creator’s plan”. Therefore, the Congregation insists that priests do not have the power to bless such unions.

Notice the ambiguous optics here. The Pope makes sympathetic pastoral comments about homosexuals then countersigns the *responsum ad dubium*. Homosexuality is one of the many battering rams of progressive politics. Christians are being pressured to accept the normalisation of homosexual behaviour. This is not happening because God is love. It is happening because there was a sexual revolution in the 1960s and because

the West has discovered cures for sexually transmissible infections. Without that revolution, or those cures, there would be no demand to normalise same-sex relationships.

POPE Francis has called for a more synodal Church. What does this mean? Is synodal synonymous with synodical? Is it a wish list for the Holy Spirit? If the signs are propitious, does the wish list get longer, as Christians realise God's will is to ordain women priests and practicing homosexuals while devolving management to the laity?

Anglicanism has synodical government, which roughly parallels the parliamentary model, but that model has failed to defend the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic faith. The Anglican hierarchy should have seen Gene Robinson coming. He is, after all, the inevitable product of the sexual revolution, what Carl Trueman calls the triumph of the Modern self. The failure of Anglican polity must be considered carefully, since Anglicanism and Catholicism are closely identified, and importing Anglican tensions into Roman Catholicism is risky.

Then there are the conflicting narratives around what the Pope is trying to achieve, since he is prone to jesuitical casuistry. Depending on who one speaks to, he is either gaslighting Catholics or struggling heroically to reform the Church. One wonders whether he countersigned the *responsum ad dubium* about same-sex relationships not because he agreed with it but because he was bound to do so by the nature of his office.

Cardinal Pell made several points about the nature of episcopal authority as an observer to the Synod of Bishops in October 2015:

We bishops are gathered as successors of the apostles ... While we teach with and under the successor of Peter, we are not delegates of the Pope ... We stand under the Word of God as its servants and protectors ... we have no power to change the central teachings of the New Testament or the essential teachings of popes

and councils ... We can contribute to the genuine development of doctrine ... But we have no power to change or diminish the Word of God, much less to refashion it according to prevailing insights, or relativise the objective truths of Catholic faith and morals as passing expressions in some Hegelian flux ... not even a council with and under a pope can change essential Catholic moral teachings sanctioned by Scripture and the Magisterium.

Despite this, in December 2023 Pope Francis authorised priests to bless same-sex relationships, on the casuistical proviso that they are not the same as sacramental marriages. This has already caused revolt among autonomous Eastern Churches in communion with Rome. This hyper-novel Western issue will not end well.

#### Byline

Michael Giffin is an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Sydney. His latest book *Interpreting Literary Texts: A Post-Kantian Approach* was released in September 2024 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.