

CHAPTER FOUR

TWO BY TWO: RELIGION, SEXUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN CANADA

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Canada is a nation that prides itself on being a mosaic rather than a melting pot, upholding the ideal that people do not have to conform to any single definition of what a Canadian is. That ideal is not just an abstract hope. It is supported by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and other legislation, by Human Rights Commissions, and by policies on employment and pay equity, among others. We want to value diversity by allowing varying cultural identities to flourish side by side—whether those identities are informed by race or ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, sexuality, geographical provenance, language, or other cultural variables. Yet we also struggle with whether or how diversity has limits. It certainly has limits when it impinges on the rights and welfare of others. It has limits when it seeks to go beyond the guarantees in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and impose itself on all other Canadians.

In theory, diversity means that we both permit and value a broad range of ways of being, thinking and acting. But it is not always observed that our claims to value diversity often sit over against an (unstated) assumption that diversity is set in relation to a hegemonic view of what is normative. That is, there is a normative “Canadian-ness” over and against which others are judged to be “diverse.” I will not make an attempt to explore this idea of the normative Canadian fully here, but only in relation to religion and sexuality. In relation to religion, the normative Canadian is Christian (even if he or she never goes to church). In relation to sexuality, this normative Canadian is heterosexual. And, overwhelmingly, even despite the increase of the cohabitation of unmarried couples in the last 25 years, this normative Canadian is married (Statistics Canada 2001a), hence the “two by two” of the title.

In Canada, freedom of conscience and religion as enshrined in the Charter guarantees that people can both practice the religion of their

choice and believe what they will. There is no expectation that everyone who is not born Christian will convert to Christianity. People have a wide range of religious adherence or no religion at all. But Canada is also a country where almost 77% of people claim to be Christian (Statistics Canada 2001b). Although there is no established religion, at Canada's founding both Anglicans and Roman Catholics were given certain religious rights. Many parts of Canada have Roman Catholic school systems and, until recently in Ontario, the "public" school system functioned as a Protestant school system where Protestant clergy could come and go to teach their brand of religion. As Lori Beaman convincingly argues (2003), Canadian legal attitudes to religion are shaped by a broadly Christian way of understanding what religion is and how it ought to function in human life.

From the point of view of expectations of nondiscrimination, diversities are equal, but they are not the same in terms of the degree to which they are attributed or chosen. Many religious traditions are partly or fully chosen by their adherents, all the more so if the religious tradition is a tradition of conversion (e.g., Christianity, Islam) than if it is a tradition of birth (e.g., Judaism). There is debate at present over the degree of choice one has in the matter of sexual diversity. What both sexual and religious diversity have in common, however, is that there are usually no publicly visible physical markers of either diversity. Thus, unlike some other marks of diversity, unless the individual chooses to display his or her religious or sexual preference publicly, it might not be known. Both religious and sexual diversity are made more complex by the fact that those in the position of "normative" religion and sexuality sometimes argue that religion and sexuality are private matters that really do not need to have a public face, thus permitting the hegemonies of Christianity and heterosexuality to go unchallenged.

Diversity and Sexuality

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Since 1995 sexual orientation has also been read into the Charter as a prohibited ground of discrimination. Nonetheless, social norms have not changed to the point where women are represented as fully equal to men in all parts of society (board rooms, for instance). Sexual minorities, that is, those who do not fit the heterosexual norm, are a relatively small part of the population who are all but invisible

in Canadian society. Members of sexual minorities are often told that as long they don't make a big deal of their sexual preferences, they will be accepted.

Diversity in terms of sexuality might mean a wide variety of things. For many, it might simply mean the assumed differences between males and females or differences in norms about heterosexual practices. And, indeed, in terms of many religious traditions, heterosexual sex is only licit within marriage, and intercourse, rather than other sexual activity, is the presumed and preferred means of sexual expression.

In common parlance these days, however, the term "sexual diversity" is usually used to indicate and encompass a wide range of sexual desires, preferences and practices. Some of the shorthand ways of expressing (at least some of) these are LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer) or LBTTQQ (add Two-Spirit[ed] and Questioning). Here, "transgender" means that one chooses to live outside the given roles of one's assigned gender. "Transsexual" usually means that one is taking medical steps toward sex reassignment. "Two-spirited" designates sexual and gender diversity among first nations' peoples. In relation to persons, "queer" is usually a broad category used to encompass anyone who does not fit or want to be seen to fit into the perceived (heterosexual) norm. Interestingly enough, designations like LGBTQ leave aside "heterosexuality" except when seen to be encompassed by "queer," thus allowing the assumed normative of "heterosexual" to continue, which is why some, seeking to name this complexity, simply use "sexual diversity" or "sexual and gender diversity" and allow that term to be as broadly encompassing as possible.

None of these terms to indicate diverse sexualities (including heterosexual) is univocal. All of these terms are problematized in a number of ways. For instance, is one lesbian because one is a woman who is sexually attracted to or desires women? Is one lesbian if one has acted on that desire with at least one other woman? Is one lesbian because one lives in a life partnership with another woman? Is it "lesbian" to prefer the company of women to the company of men? Can "lesbian" be a political label to name oneself outside the mainstream? Is being "lesbian" an inherent state, a given? Is it a chosen reality? Does it change with time? Is one a lesbian if one names oneself a lesbian regardless of practices or desires? Is lesbian a name given to one by others? Today, for the most part, theorists are content to let people name themselves and their own realities. But the upshot of this is great variability in the meaning of terms.

Discussions of sexual diversity are further complicated by contemporary discussions of both sex and gender. It is now commonplace to assume that gender roles are socially constructed; that we learn how to act either in accordance with or in opposition to what are considered to be appropriate ways of being male or female in our society. As Westerners we assume maleness and femaleness from the very beginning as a decisive division of humanity and then we use it as a sorting mechanism to provide categories into which to put people. Most people today take this to be self-evident in the same way that students with whom I studied thirty years ago took there to be essentially different masculine and feminine character traits. As Christine Delphy says: “we now see gender as the *content* with sex as the *container*” (2001: 414).

Contrary to this notion of the naturalness of biological bifurcation into male and female, an increasing number of theorists argue that it is the fact that we see gender divisions as important that pushes us to place so much emphasis on the biological difference between male and female. For Delphy, for instance, gender precedes sex. She does not deny the biological characteristics for reproduction. But she does question why sex rather than say, eye color, should have given rise to the bifurcated division on which so much social difference has been predicated. We emphasize sex, she argues, because so much has depended and still continues to depend on gendered views of the human world. Sex is not entirely self-evident. How for certain does one decide what counts as male or female—by penis or lack thereof? By ability to bear children? By chromosomal exploration? For Delphy sex, like gender, is socially, not biologically, constructed.

Why is the sex difference emphasized as bifurcated and binary? Delphy’s suspicion, shared by a number of others, is that these binary differences are seen to be important in order to keep certain social values in place—social values that still give males priority over females and that value heterosexuality above same-sex relationships.

Until the last few decades, human sexuality was usually understood as a fixed phenomenon. It was thought to endure over time in roughly the same form, with the same properties. But recently we have come to see in sexuality, as in other areas of human existence from forms of energy to the organization of space, that our categories for classification are not naturally occurring, but the result of human artifice (Gudorf 2000: 45).

Much theory about sex and gender today contends that sex, like gender, is a matter of interpretation—that the idea of sex bifurcated as male

and female is not an unquestionable matter of natural importance, but an interpretation. As Georgia Warnke (2001: 134) notes in response to the argument that procreation is what shows us how important and natural this bifurcation is: how often do we really want to reproduce? In other words, for most of our lives we are non-reproductive: why is reproduction seen to be the key to understanding human categories? In terms of our current understanding of gender roles in the West, it would seem that for virtually everything else besides human reproduction, sex is purportedly seen as relatively unimportant. That is, if most of us claim that sex is irrelevant to education, employment or domestic duty, why do we want to hold so firmly on to the categorical distinction between male and female? If we ask the question about who benefits most from the organization of society into males and females, the answer is: males in heterosexual relationships—that is, those who have the unquestioned and normative right to be at the top of the pyramid of power and authority in society. (This analysis does not mean to discount all the other factors that also would be relevant to greater and lesser power and authority such as class, ethnicity, and so on, just to bracket them for the purposes of this discussion.)

If sex is socially constructed, so, too, is the notion of “sexual orientation.” Sexual orientation as a concept depends on a stable idea of sex. If the category “sex” is unstable or fluid, the whole notion of orientation on the basis of “same” or “opposite” sex becomes meaningless. Michael Foucault (1978) argues that the term “homosexual” was invented in the 19th century as a way to pathologize people who engaged in certain sexual behaviors. This does not mean that no one engaged in homoerotic thought or activity until the 19th century, nor does it mean that there might not have been the possibility of constructing a view of oneself or one’s identity based on one’s sexual attraction (Clark 2002: 249). But it does mean that the notion of a stable orientation that is given in “nature,” persists over time, and is considered one of the most important indicators of a person’s identity, is a relatively recent invention. The 19th century view of “homosexuality” brought together a psychiatric notion of orientation; a psychoanalytic notion of sexual object choice and a sociological notion of deviance (Halperin 2002: 57). From its beginnings as a term, “homosexuality” was meant to mark something stable, negative, and non-normative. Alongside this notion of orientation is a heteronormative value judgment that “homosexuality” is a lesser way of being alongside “heterosexuality.” Jeffrey Weeks notes that “The notion that ‘a homosexual,’ whether male or

female could live a life fully organized around his sexual orientation is consequently of very recent origin.” New categorizations arose in the late 19th century which had the effect of seeing a homosexual man as “the archetypal sexed being, a person whose sexuality pervaded him in his very existence, threatened to corrupt all around him and particularly the young” (1989: 107, 109).

So, historically speaking, the question of “homosexual identity” is relatively recent. “The idea that there are only two (or three) sexual identities, and that everyone must decide which is most appropriate for himself or herself, is very recent as the dominant mode of structuring sexuality. Late too is the notion that sexual object choice is defined by biological sex: a heterosexual desires member of the “opposite sex,” a homosexual desires members of the “same sex,” and a bisexual may desire either. By viewing sexualities in historical perspective, the relative novelty of such ideas quickly becomes apparent. Thus, “‘heteronormativity’ becomes the ‘heterosexual imaginary’” (Phillips and Reay 2002: 3).

Much recent theory, then, challenges the notion that there are stable, inherent sexual identities. In light of this challenge, the notion of diversity in regard to sexuality becomes more complex. One’s identity may be fluid and variable over time. And even the “identity” itself may be fragmented as the social construction of the idea of sex renders our categories of same and opposite less useful. That said, however, most of the discussions of sexual diversity that take place in the Canadian mainstream, including the courts, depend on certain understandings of group belonging to make their case against (or for?) discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual orientation.

Whether “gay” and “lesbian,” for example, name stable groupings of people, whether or not sex is a social construct, the attribution of rights and responsibilities on the basis of sex and sexual orientation depend on the ability to categorize people as part of a group for specific purposes. Such attributions of rights and responsibilities also depend on a system where such defined groups have already historically been seen as groups and have already been denied certain rights and responsibilities on the basis of assumed belonging to such a group.

Sexual Diversity and Religious Diversity

Most religious traditions in Canada, like most of Canadian society, assume a basic division of humanity into male and female. Further, religious traditions usually place great weight on that division in terms of assigning appropriate gender roles and in terms of determining licit sexual conduct.¹ Religious traditions are certainly not monolithic. There is no single opinion or point of view that can be said to hold sway for all members of a given religious tradition. Nonetheless, there are certain historic trajectories that do dominate the way particular religious traditions tend to see specific topics, in this case sex and sexuality. Attitudes to sexual diversity are often connected to what a religious tradition understands to be the purposes of sexuality as well as to its traditional understandings of the roles of males and females.

In Orthodox Judaism, for example, gay and lesbian relationships are condemned on the basis of religious texts that give certain roles to men and others to women, to violate which would be a confusion of important categories. Sexuality, within traditional Judaism, is highly valued as a means to procreation. Thus, non-procreative sexuality is traditionally seen as problematic, especially for men to whom the commandment to procreate is explicitly given. Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, however, have reinterpreted these texts in ways that allow, for example, for broader access to contraceptives and thus open the way to the possibility that non-procreative sexuality, including gay and lesbian sexuality, can be seen as good.

Hinduism, like Judaism, values sex for procreation and, for the most part, has no place at present for discussions of sexual diversity as a mainstream option. Also, women and men have historically been seen to have very different roles. Hinduism is a vast set of traditions, however, with much variance and there are, in India, some important examples of sex/gender diversity such as *hijras* (sometimes called third gender [see Nanda 2002]). For the most part, this diversity has not informed North American Hinduism.

Islam has placed a similar stress on procreation and on married sexuality. Men and women, for the most part, are considered to have

¹ For more information on how sex is seen in various religious traditions, see Manning and Zuckerman 2005. For more information on how various religious traditions have seen non-heterosexual sexuality, see Alpert 1997; Cabézon 1992; Comstock and Henking 1997; Magonet 1995; Swidler 1993.

very specific religious roles. In Canadian Islam, these roles are often reinforced by the cultural origins or dependencies of particular Muslim communities. There have been very few moves, however, within any forms of Islam in North America to accept gay and lesbian sexuality.²

In Buddhism, sex is one of many things that can get in the way of enlightenment. Procreation has not been seen as religiously important. As Buddhism has come to North America and been embraced by converts already steeped in North American values, it has often adapted to the values and lifestyles of its converts, many of whom have been gay and lesbian. North American Buddhism has also tried to downplay differences based on sex, although it would be fair to say that in many Buddhist sub traditions, being female is considered one of the hindrances to enlightenment.

The remainder of this chapter will look at sexual diversity and Canadian Christianity because it is within Christian churches in Canada that most religious discussion of sexual diversity has taken place. Christianity, like all other religious traditions that have survived for any length of time, is diverse. There are, however, dominant themes in the tradition that inform much of the current Canadian discussions on sexual diversity.

Christian attitudes to sexual diversity are founded on Christian views of sexuality. Christianity has often been called a “sex negative” religious tradition (Manning and Zuckerman 2005: 2). Christianity is a religion of converts, not of birth and so procreation as a means to religious growth was not a priority. Indeed, the earliest Christians thought that the second coming of Jesus would happen in their lifetimes, so there were no real plans for the continuity of the church until late in the 1st Christian century. Also, early in Christianity (influenced by neo-Platonism) there tended to be a split between bodies and spirits, where spirits were valued for their relationship with God, while bodies were seen as hindrances to that relationship. Thus, several forces converged to put a stress on chastity, rather than on procreation. From about the 3rd century on, chastity was commonly seen as the preferred Christian state. The best Christians were those who controlled their bodily

² One exception to this would be “Salaam Canada: Queer Muslim Community,” <http://www.salaamcanada.org/study3.html>, a Canadian Muslim Community dedicated “to social justice, peace and human dignity... [in] a world free from injustice including... discrimination... homophobia and transphobia.”

(especially sexual) urges. Sexual activity was a second-best option, meant to keep lust in check.

Unlike in Judaism, sexuality was not a good in and of itself. It was, rather, a necessary evil. Thus, the only potentially redeeming value that the leaders of the Christian church could envisage for sexuality was the value of procreation. So within Christianity the entire weight of sexuality was focused on procreation. This focus became more and more developed throughout the early church and into the Middle Ages and it became the dominant point of view until the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Protestant Reformers thought that everyone should marry, but this viewpoint was not as much a whole-hearted endorsement of sexuality as it was a calculated assessment of the realities of lust and the dangers into which one could be led without an outlet for that lust.

The traditional Roman Catholic preference for celibacy as the optimal lifestyle (fully enforced on priests and religious after the Middle Ages) has a direct effect both on the official Roman Catholic position against artificial birth control and the official position that homosexual “inclination” is “objectively disordered” (Catechism 2000: Sec. 2358). The Roman Catholic Church and many of the Protestant churches emphasize the notion of “complementarity,” which means that men and women are opposites who are meant to be together to constitute a fully human whole. In the Roman Catholic tradition this stands alongside the ideal of celibacy. In Protestantism this replaces the ideal of celibacy.

For both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, the norm has developed that sexuality is meant to be expressed only within marriage. Outside marriage, chastity is the desired sexual norm. Since most are not called to permanent chastity, heterosexual pairing for procreative purposes became the norm and the expectation. This does not mean that the norm was never violated; the history of sexuality and the churches is replete with the formulation of rules of sexual conduct, indicating that there must be practices that necessitated the forming of those rules in the first place (Wiesner-Hanks 2000). Thus, officially, within traditional forms of Christianity, acceptable sexual diversity has been very limited—chastity or marriage. Relatively recently, some Protestant churches have begun to rethink those traditional norms in various ways.

Because of the historic wariness of sexuality in general, and because of the strong emphasis on sexuality for procreation, the Christian

tradition has, for the most part, not been able to find any officially approved place for other sorts of sexual desire, relationships, or performance. This does not mean that there were no such relationships. Sexual diversity can take a wide variety of forms, from explicit genital activity, to specific commitments to a long-term relationship, to unenacted desire, to forms of dress and action, and so on. In various eras of the church the number and types of prohibitions against what we would call sexual diversity varied (Wiesner-Hanks 2000; Boswell 1980). In monasteries and convents, “special friendships” were prohibited. Certain forms of clerical dress might be seen as gender-bending. Sublimated sexuality abounded in certain eras, as when, for example, in the medieval church, there was a large-scale production of sermons on the biblical book Song of Songs, where the lovers in the text are read as allegories of the love of God for the church.

Sexual Diversity and Christianity in Canada

Sexual diversity arises for the Christian churches in Canada as the issue of “homosexuality.” From the 1960s onward, Christian churches had to begin to grapple with changing sexual mores. Cheap, reliable birth control methods meant that sexuality was more and more decoupled from the threat of pregnancy. Increasing numbers of heterosexual couples began to live together before or without marriage. Gay men and lesbians began to be somewhat more visible.

By the 1980s, gay men and lesbians began more publicly and vocally to resist discrimination because of their sexuality. Québec was the first province to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in 1975. Others followed suit in the 1980s. In 1995 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that “sexual orientation” should be read into Article 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a prohibited ground of discrimination. In 1996 (Bill C-33), discrimination was prohibited on the ground of “sexual orientation” under the federal Human Rights Act. In the historic *M.v.H.* ruling in 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that, under Section 15 of the Charter, same-sex couples had the same spousal rights as unmarried, common law, male-female couples. In 2003, same-sex marriage became legal in some parts of Canada, and in 2005, Bill C-38 was passed defining marriage in Canada as between “two persons.” Over this same period of time more attention also began to be paid to other forms of sexual diversity, from bisexuality to trans issues of a variety of sorts.

For the churches, the main issues that arose around sexual diversity were: the question of the ordination of gay men and lesbians, the question of how to minister to sexually diverse congregants, the question of same-sex marriage. During the 1980s and 1990s many Protestant churches in Canada set themselves on a course of studying and making new statements about sexuality.

Canadian churches vary widely on their current attitudes to sexual diversity. For the most part, churches have dealt only with issues of gay and lesbian sexuality. Churches have not really ventured into thinking much about bisexuality or trans issues. For the Roman Catholic Church, as mentioned above, “homosexuality” is “objectively disordered.” There is no way in which same-sex activity can be condoned, and although there had, in the relatively recent past, been some variability on whether an individual’s “orientation” is problematic (if not acted upon), there is every indication that, under the current Pope, even inclinations toward same-sex relationships are to be condemned whether acted on or not. Because priests are expected to be celibate, the question of sexual “orientation” had not been seen as a problem for ordination until recently when, under the current Pope, seminaries are being investigated with a view to removing “homosexuals.” Although the Catholic Church professes to be against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the church opposed the move to read Sexual Orientation into Article 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a prohibited ground of discrimination (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1996). In terms of meeting the pastoral needs of sexually diverse members, this is possible only as long as that does not include condoning their sexuality or their relationships. Indeed, in the United States recently a nun and a priest were disciplined for their pastoral ministries among members of sexual minorities (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1999). It should come as no surprise, then, that the Roman Catholic Church opposes same-sex marriage on grounds that it is opposed in scripture and tradition, as well as on the assumption that it violates the natural order of things—that the basic purpose of sexuality is and can only be procreative.

Within most evangelical Christian churches, gay and lesbian issues are seen in ways parallel to how they are seen in Roman Catholicism.³ The

³ The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is an umbrella organization for many evangelical churches in this country. For a list of member churches, see: <http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?&pid=848&srcid=384>.

Evangelical Fellowship of Canada also opposed the reading of “sexual orientation” into the Charter as a prohibited ground of discrimination (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada 1996). Marriage, not celibacy, is seen as the best calling, and married, procreative sexuality is celebrated (EFC 2007). The Bible is interpreted as being in total opposition to gay and lesbian sexuality. Other arguments against same-sex sexuality are also made on the basis of the procreative nature of marriage (as a relationship where two become “one flesh”) and on the basis of an assumed natural order. Usually a distinction is made between the “sinner” and the “sin” so that gay and lesbian members are welcome so long as they are not in sexual relationships. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada posts links on its Website to New Direction Ministries of Canada, an organization seeking to help gays and lesbians who want to change their sexual orientation.⁴ Ordaining an openly gay or lesbian minister would not be possible. Unanimously, evangelical churches are opposed to same-sex marriage.

The Metropolitan Community Church was founded in 1968 to minister to the religious needs of gays and lesbians who had been disenfranchised and called sinners by other churches. It is founded on the premise that gays and lesbians are as much children of God as anyone else. The biblical texts that are used against same-sex sexuality are read by the Metropolitan Community Church as historical, contextualized documents. They are also read in relation both to church tradition and to human reason and experience. Thus, the Bible does not “answer” all the issues of the contemporary world (West 2005). The Bible has very few passages that are thought to deal with “homosexuality,” making it a very marginal biblical theme. Stress is placed on the welcoming nature of Jesus and his commitment to love and justice for all (Eastman 1990). Since 2000, the Metropolitan Community Church Toronto sought to register marriages performed in its church, after reading banns the prescribed number of times, as legal marriages. Once same-sex marriage was legalized, those previous marriages were officially registered.

The United Church of Canada claims that it takes the biblical texts seriously but not literally. It reads the biblical texts that are understood by others as condemning homosexuality in light of its broader understanding of the biblical message as one of love and reconciliation and

⁴ <http://www.newdirection.ca>.

in recognition that the present context of discussions of sexuality is far different from the biblical context (United Church of Canada 1989; United Church of Canada 2003b). The Genesis text about the creation of male and female is not read as a text about complementarity and procreation. Rather, it is read to affirm every individual's wholeness in the image of God. Biblical understandings are placed alongside experience and knowledge in the contemporary world. Social justice for the oppressed is a major theme in United Church decision-making.

In the 1980s the United Church embarked on a series of studies of sexuality that opened the way for its current understanding. In 1984, the United Church it argued against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and urged all members of the church to work against such discrimination (United Church of Canada 1984: 79). In 1988, it decided that sexual orientation was not in and of itself a basis on which to deny ordination to otherwise-qualified individuals and it did not enjoin celibacy on gay and lesbian Christians as most Canadian denominations had done (United Church of Canada 1988). In 2000 the United Church affirmed that sexual orientation, whatever it is, is recognized as a gift from God (United Church of Canada 2000). The United Church has an official position in favor of same-sex marriage although individual congregations are allowed to make their own decisions about whether they will perform such marriages in their congregations (United Church of Canada 2003a). Thus, the view of the United Church is that gay men and lesbians are called to the same kind of fidelity in their relationships as all other Christians. Relationships should be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self (United Church of Canada 2005). Canadian Unitarians and Quakers are also officially supportive of sexual diversity in relation to ordination, pastoral care and same-sex marriage.

In the mid-1990s, The Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a Statement on Human Sexuality that assumes male and female complementarity based on Genesis 1 as the fullness of creation. It affirms that the proper context of sex is marriage and that the purpose of marriage is procreative and unitive. The assumption in this statement is that, although there are various ways to interpret the scriptural passages that seem to be about homosexual activity, most clearly the passage from Romans 1 condemns all homosexual activity (Presbyterian Church in Canada 1996). This statement reads homosexual activity as part of creation distorted by sin. It is not a "Christian option" (Presbyterian

Church in Canada 1996: 6.20). Nonetheless, the church must “repent of its homophobia and hypocrisy” (Presbyterian Church in Canada 1996: 6.23).

In 2003, the church’s Special Committee on Sexual Orientation explored and reported on varying biblical, theological, and cultural views of sexual orientation and decided that any “definitive recommendation concerning the roles of homosexual people in the church would be divisive, regardless of the direction taken” (Presbyterian Church in Canada 2003). Thus, no such recommendations were made. In looking at candidates for ordination, for example, the Presbyterian Church clearly draws a line between what it understands to be homosexual orientation and acting on that orientation. Thus, celibacy or chastity is expected of gays and lesbians in its clergy and elsewhere in the church (Presbyterian Church in Canada 1996).

The position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is very similar to that of the Canadian Presbyterians in that they have studied issues of sexuality and homosexuality for several years and they acknowledge the diversity of opinions on the Bible and on church tradition (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada 2004a). Officially, the church affirms that marriage is for heterosexual couples only and enjoins chastity for gays and lesbians. In 2005 they declined to pass a motion that local congregations could choose to bless same-sex partnerships, and in 2007 they rejected the possibility of blessing same-sex unions (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada 2007). Yet, they oppose discrimination against gay men and lesbians in law and society and the church wants to be a welcoming place for gay and lesbian Christians (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada 2004b).

Although it has national autonomy, the Anglican Church of Canada is part of a worldwide communion of Anglican churches and in recent years it has come under attack for what Anglicans in other parts of the world as too permissive an attitude to gay and lesbian sexuality. There is not a general agreement in the church about what the Bible says about gay and lesbian sexuality and how to apply that to the present. Nor is there agreement about how to apply the church’s tradition to the present. In 1997 the Canadian Bishops issued a statement that although they accept all persons regardless of sexual orientation that this “is not an acceptance of homosexual activity” (Anglican Bishops of Canada 1997). Theologically, the Anglican Church declares that “homosexual persons are created in the image and likeness of God and have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance,

concern and care of the church” (Anglican Bishops of Canada 1997). Officially the Anglican Church has “condemned bigotry, violence and hatred directed toward any due to their sexual orientation” (Anglican Bishops of Canada 1997 [quoting General Synod 1995]) and it has supported the move to read sexual orientation into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a prohibited grounds of discrimination.

The Anglican Church understands marriage to be only for heterosexual couples and bases this understanding on its interpretation of complementarity in Genesis 1. But where disagreement arises is in whether gay and lesbian couples should be able to seek a church blessing. Although the House of Bishops does not authorize such blessings, the diocese of New Westminster has in the past made it possible for clergy to offer such blessings, although it is not clear if the diocese will continue to do so given recent Anglican rulings. In 1997, the House of Bishops enjoined chastity on all those who were not married. By 2004, however, there was some movement on this as the General Synod of the Anglican Church passed a motion affirming “the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same sex relationships” (Anglican Church of Canada 2004). In 2007, however, the General Synod ruled that blessing same-sex relationships was not a matter of core doctrine and thus could be possible, but then narrowly defeated a motion that would have permitted local dioceses to begin offering blessings for same-sex couples (Anglican Church of Canada 2007).

Many Canadian churches were active in the debate over same-sex marriage. In the public discussions, the main opposition to same-sex marriage came from the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. The main church support for same-sex marriage came from the United Church of Canada and the Metropolitan Community churches. All of the above-mentioned groups were intervenors in various court cases and testified in various federal hearings about the extension of benefits and, ultimately, of the right to marry to gay and lesbian couples.⁵

Within the diversity of Canadian churches there is a wide variety of opinion on sexual diversity. Here I have outlined only the official policies of some churches. But within these churches there is also much variability. Within churches that find sexual diversity problematic there

⁵ For a discussion of what these churches said and did in the public policy debate about same-sex marriage, see Young 2006.

are often organizations (such as Dignity in the Roman Catholic church and Integrity in the Anglican Church) to support those in their midst who are marginalized on the basis of their sexuality.⁶ Most Canadians agree that any discrimination against people on the basis of sexuality is wrong, and a majority of Canadians supports same-sex marriage. Since more than 75% of Canadians identify as Christian, there is clearly some overlap between those who identify as Christian and those who support members of sexual minorities, indicating that there are many Canadians who disagree with their own churches in matters of sexual diversity.

None of the Canadian churches has begun to grapple with the implications for their positions of more recent theories about the fluidity of sex and sexuality. The Canadian churches assume that the categories “male” and “female” mark real and important differences within humanity and that one’s sexual orientation is a given. At present, most Canadian churches are not places where one could be fully open about one’s sexuality if it did not meet either the norms of chastity or heterosexual marriage. Protestations of churches that all are welcome may well ring hollow when many churches refuse to affirm people in all their sexual diversity and in their relationships, and when the possibility of marriage is not open to them. Nonetheless, the variance of Christian responses to sexual diversity indicates that there is no single “Christian” opinion on the matter that holds sway in Canada today.

As poll results indicate, Canadians overwhelmingly support rights for members of sexual minorities and support for gay and lesbian marriage has increased since the legalization of same-sex marriage.⁷ Views of sexuality are changing among Canadians, so that even those churches most opposed to “non-traditional” expressions of sexuality might well have to shift their rhetoric so that they will not be seen as speaking negatively about Canadians whose sexual expression does not accord with their specific church views. Thirty years ago when our view of women’s “proper” place began to change, we had only an inkling of the

⁶ See www.dignitycanada.org; www.integritycanada.org.

⁷ An Environics Poll released in June 2006 finds that 59% of Canadians support same-sex marriage while only 32% oppose it (see <http://www.equal-marriage.ca/resource.php?id=514>). These numbers are up from numbers in earlier years. For survey results from a variety of organizations over several years, see: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homssmpoll06.htm>; <http://www.religioustolerance.com/homssmpoll05.htm>; <http://www.religioustolerance.com/homssmpoll04.htm>; <http://www.religioustolerance.com/homssmpoll04.htm>.

changes that would result, both in women's lives and in social attitudes toward women as normative citizens of Canada. In a similar way, the instability of our views about sexuality means that over the next few decades there will be huge changes in the way society views those who are now considered members of sexual minorities.

I entitled this chapter "Two by Two" to indicate that, just as in the biblical story of Noah's Ark, the currently accepted norm that is held by most religious traditions in Canada today is that people ought to be coupled into heterosexual, procreative pairs. Many social forces are causing this normative view to shift. Relationships come in many forms. Religious traditions will have to grapple with these social changes if they want to remain relevant to the vast majority of Canadians.

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