

FRIENDSHIP: THE END OF MARRIAGE¹

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THESE THOUGHTS ON friendship are intended as a contribution to the present debate in The Anglican Church of Canada about whether the Church should perform a wedding ceremony for two men or two women, or at least give its blessing to such a wedding previously performed by civil authorities.

I begin with an assumption that I shall maintain throughout: that the quality and depth of love between two men or two women can be as deep and profound as the love experienced between two persons of opposite sex. Two men or two women can be struck by cupid's arrow in much the same way as a man and a woman, and have similar experiences of "falling in love" with one another. In the tradition of the Church, when a Christian man and woman discover themselves to be "in love," often this couple will prayerfully seek discernment as to whether it is God's will for them to live together for the rest of their lives in a marriage established by the exchange of vows of mutual fidelity to "love and to cherish, till death do us part." The tradition of the Church has never formally allowed a man and man, or woman and woman couple who find themselves "in love" to take these same vows. Many argue that the time has come for the Church to offer marriage as an option for same sex couples.

But what does this have to do with friendship? Friendship love at first might seem to be something very different from the "romantic" or erotic love of marriage. In this paper I shall suggest that erotic love (along with *philia* love and *agape* love) is present in many types of friendship love, whether that friendship love is found inside or outside of marriage. Indeed, I believe that the Church has inadequately understood friendship love in recent times and that this lack of understanding has contributed to a confusion in the Church about the relation of friendship love and marriage.

In my pastoral ministry of twenty-five years I have many times felt handicapped by the shallow valuation given to "friendship" in Christian discourse. In my experience "friendship" is seldom acknowledged as including the possibility of particular relationships of profound intimacy, spiritual union and mutual "exchange." Rather, friendship is considered to be a less intimate and inferior form of relationship than that found in marriage. Thus the same-sex "covenanted friendship" in the Christian tradition, described most recently in authors such as Pavel Florensky, John Boswell and Alan Bray, is almost always immediately equated with marriage, or a parody of marriage, rather than be seen as a distinct and profound instance of friendship. I hope that this paper will contribute in some small way to restore confidence in the divine beauty and eternal character of friendship. My overall conclusion is that a recovery of a fuller Christian appreciation of friendship and friendship-love is urgently needed in our present debate.

It is difficult to begin with a definition of friendship because there are many different types of friendship. Nevertheless, I suggest that most people today might think of friendship as a particular relationship or activity of mutual

1. An earlier version of this paper, "Friendship and the Good Life" was given at the 25th Annual Atlantic Theological Conference in 2005 and published in *Christian Friendship*, Susan Harris (ed.), Charlottetown, 2005, pp 201–238.

and reciprocal goodwill, characterized by qualities of honesty, trust, respect, self-disclosure, caring, and affection, between people who seek to spend time together. Cicero defines friendship as “agreement in all things divine and human, with benevolence and charity” (*De Amicitia* 6,20). Both these definitions — modern and ancient — serve to distance our discussion of friendship from the two types of friendship that Aristotle says are only friendships “incidentally” – viz. friendships of pleasure or friendships of usefulness. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1156a). Finally, within the broad spectrum of human friendships, we will be considering only those friendships that have a “lasting,” “lifelong,” or even “eternal” character.

For the past four hundred years or so there has been very little philosophical consideration of friendship as an essential force in the shaping of culture, the moral life and human happiness. Writing in the 1950s, C.S. Lewis remarks on the lack of attention given to the subject of friendship in modern times:

To the Ancients, Friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue. The modern world, in comparison, ignores it. ... If a man believes (as I do) that the old estimate of friendship was the correct one, he can hardly write a chapter on it except as rehabilitation.²

I begin my consideration of friendship generally with a remarkable study that appeared in Russia in 1914, though translated into English only in 1997. Its author, Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), a Russian Orthodox priest, was one of the most remarkable polymaths of the twentieth century. His study of friendship is contained in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* which takes its theme from I Timothy 3.15:

I hope to come to you soon, but I [Paul] am writing these instructions to you [Timothy] so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.

Florensky’s argument is that in the household of God we are meant to relate to one another as friends, with friendship love, and only in this way will we know the truth of the Christian faith. In form and style Florensky’s work consists of twelve letters addressed to the reader as if to a friend. The book has been criticized because it does not proceed as a systematic study but it is rather full of digressions, excurses, appendices and labored footnotes. But Florensky intentionally writes in this manner, as if he was having a conversation over a period of time with a friend. Somehow it is in this way, through an encounter in friendship, that the truth of the Christian faith will be known.³

Friendship is the eleventh letter of the series of twelve. He has already revealed to the reader in previous letter on Holy Sophia that Sophia, Truth and Friendship are connected. Friendship is required to know Sophia and experience Truth. Only in friendship do we participate in “that spiritual activity in which and by means of which the knowledge of the Pillar of Truth is given.”⁴ Florensky suggests that in Christianity the most fundamental unit

2. Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*, (San Diego, New York, London: G. Bles., 1960), 87, 90.

3. This is a traditional mode of expression in Christian theology, reaching back through the genres of *eratopokriseis* (Mark of Ephesus, Michael Glykas, Nicholas of Methone, Psellus, Photius, Maximus the Confessor, Anastasius of Sinai) and *kephalaia* (Gregory Palamas, Maximus the Confessor, Diadochus of Photike, Evagrius Ponticus) all the way to *apophthegmata* and their early transmission via letters (cf. Barsanouphius and John). This style rests upon a definite epistemological assertion and an important pedagogic approach. The *Stromateis* (or “Ragbag”) of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) is more or less a collection of jottings in the precise way that Florensky identifies his work (p. 5), full of themes difficult to sort out and state systematically.

4. Florensky, P. *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. and annotated by Boris Jakim, (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. x.

is not the individual man understood as an atomic unit, but rather the pair of friends as the basic molecule. It is a brilliant study in which Florensky mines the intellectual history of east and west, ancients and moderns, Christians, Jews and pagans.

Philia knows a friend not by his outward pose, not by the dress of heroism, but by his smile, by his quiet talk, by his weaknesses, by how he treats people in ordinary human life, by how he eats and sleeps ... the true test of a soul's authenticity is through life *together*, in the love of friends ...

What is friendship? Self-contemplation through a friend in God. Friendship is the seeing of oneself with the eyes of another, but before a third, namely, the Third. ... Friendship gives people self-knowledge. Friendship reveals where and how one must work on oneself.⁵

Drawing upon his masterful familiarity with the classical tradition, Florensky describes the friend as like a mirror in which we see ourselves, both what is lovely and what needs to be re-arranged in our own soul. *Agape* love — that rational willing of the good for all persons — is dependent upon a friendship love (*philia*), and *vice versa*:

In order to treat everyone as oneself [*agape* love] it is necessary to see oneself at least in one person, to feel oneself in him; it is necessary to perceive in this one person an already achieved — even if only partial — victory over selfhood... But for *philia* love of a Friend not to degenerate in a peculiar self-love, for a Friend not to become merely the condition of a comfortable life, for friendship to have a depth, ... what is necessary is *agape* love ... *philia* is the “leaven,” while *agape* is the “salt” that keeps human relations from spoiling.⁶

In his discussion of the four Greek words for love (*eros*, *storge*, *philia* and *agape*), Florensky acknowledges that these notions inform one another and are not really four different “things.” For example, he uses the word *philia* as relating closest to friendship love, but insists that *eros* and *agape* must also be present in the love of friends. He concludes this discussion with a moving meditation on the conversation of Jesus and Peter in the last chapter of John's Gospel. Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him. The Greek text suggests that Jesus understands *agape* as a lesser love than *philia* or friendship love. Peter is upset that Christ asks him if he loves him with *agape* love. *Philia* is the love with which Peter seeks to love Jesus. In *philia* (friendship love), *agape* is embodied and made real.⁷

Florensky also presents the ancient Christian rites of *adelphopoiesis* (brother-making, or the pledging of brotherhood) in which two males or two females are joined together in a covenant of chaste bonds of friendship love. He describes a typical expression of the rite as containing the following elements: (1) the brothers stand before the lectern upon which are the Cross and the Gospel; (2) prayers and litanies are said that ask that the two be united in love and that remind them of examples of friendships from church history; (3) the two are tied with one belt, their hands are placed on the Gospel, and a burning candle is given to each of them; (4) readings from Scripture, including the Gospel of John 17.18-26; ... (7) the brothers partake of the pre-sanctified gifts from a common cup; (8) they are led around the lectern while they hold hands, as the *troparion* is sung: “Lord, watch from heaven and see;” (9) they exchange kisses; and (10) the following is sung: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1). The exchange of the cross takes place either before or during the rite, as a sign that the brothers will bear each other's cross, and as a reminder of self-renunciation and faithfulness to his friend.⁸

5. Florensky, 314.

6. Florensky, 297.

7. Florensky, 291, 326.

8. Described in Florensky, 327, 328.

Florensky concludes that Friendship love is the highest love, inclusive of *eros* and *agape* in the divinely ordered particularity of *philia*. In this he truly reflects the philosophical and tradition from Plato and Aristotle through to Aelred of Rievault (12th c.), Aquinas and Dante.

Unfortunately, around the time of the sixteenth century Reformation, this rich understanding of friendship was largely forgotten, or intentionally put aside. Friendship began to receive very little philosophical and theological consideration in the west. The reason is simply, in the words of a contemporary theologian, “Within Christian thought *agape* displaced *philia* [friendship], and it is impossible to think theologically about love without giving that simple fact careful consideration.”⁹ Luther, for example, refused to allow friendship to have any role in ethics since he interpreted it narrowly as but a form of self-love. In Anglican circles the name of Jeremy Taylor (1613-67) might come to mind as an exception, but in actual fact he did not encourage particular friendships as much as he understood friendship in a universal way, describing the Christian as a friend with all the world. Of particular friendships he writes: “...when friendships were the noblest things in the world, charity was little.”¹⁰ Further, for Taylor marriage becomes the single particular state of life in which highest friendship finds an appropriate place.

The problem that was identified with friendship or *philia* is that it is an exclusive, preferential, reciprocal love. Jealousy and possessiveness belongs to friendship. *Agape*, on the other hand, is an inclusive, unconditional, universal love, blind to merit or demerit that goes out to everyone, even to the enemy who will not return such love. Soren Kierkegaard and Anders Nygren remain true to this modern notion that Christian *agape* must leave the preferential love of friendship behind. In the nineteenth century Kierkegaard writes:

Christianity has thrust erotic love and friendship from the throne, the love rooted in mood and inclination, preferential love, in order to establish spiritual love in its place, love to one’s neighbour, a love which in all earnestness and truth is inwardly more tender in the union of two persons than erotic love is and more faithful in the sincerity of close relationship than the most famous friendship. ... the praise of erotic love and friendship belong to paganism ... what belongs to Christianity [is] love to one’s neighbour, of which not a trace is found in paganism. ...

In ... friendship one’s neighbour is not loved, but one’s other-self. If anyone thinks that ... by finding a friend he has learned Christian love, he is in profound error.¹¹

Nygren’s criticism of friendship in the mid twentieth century is dependent upon Kierkegaard’s reasoning, but is even more fundamental in that he recognizes and despairs that St. John, in his Gospel and in his letters, speaks of friendship as divinely sanctioned. In John 15 Jesus speaks of his disciples becoming his friends: “You are my friends if you do as I command you.” He commands his disciples to be friends, and the specific nature of the love of the new commandment is that his disciples should love one another “as I have loved you.” This love is of such a quality and nature that it will be recognized by others: “...by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The love here is the distinct love of friendship of the new community, which was to be the continuation of his body in the world. Nygren cannot understand how this can square with the *agape* love he finds in the synoptics and in St. Paul. That *agape* love is described by Nygren as being undeserved, spontaneous and unmotivated. Johannine friendship love, on the other hand, is preferential and thus Nygren concludes that “it loses something of its original, all-embracing scope; it becomes love for those who bear the Christian name.”¹²

9. Meilaender, G. *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1981), 2.

10. Taylor, J. “A Discourse on the Nature and Offices of Friendship” in Taylor, *Whole Works* v. 1, ed. R. Heber, 1847-54, 72.

11. Kierkegaard, S. *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong, (New York: Harper and Row, 1964) 58, 68.

12. Nygren, A. *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson, (London: S.P.C.K., 1953) 154.

But the preferential aspect of friendship not only has drawn fire from Christian theologians in the modern world. It has equally created problems for moral philosophy. If friendship is emotional, partial and personal, then how can it find a place within contemporary ethical theories which are rooted in the Enlightenment notion that moral decisions must be rational, impartial and universal?

In a simplistic manner of speaking it might be said that the Enlightenment project was to “make secular” a particular understanding of the Christian religion in an attempt to form and inform culture itself with Christian principles. Thus, for example, that process of secularization involved the transformation of divine law into the universal rule of rationality; tribalism is overcome and the impartial principle of universal *agape* love and the absolute value of and respect for each individual soul becomes incarnated in a principled, enlightened society in which everyone must willingly and freely sacrifice personal desires to the extent they encroach upon the rights of others who also have absolute value. Contemporary Canadian society is profoundly shaped by just such an Enlightenment or “liberal” understanding which is praised as that which holds our pluralistic nation together. Our social institutions and commitment to such universal moral principles insure cooperation among people who share no common notion of the good or the virtuous life.

Thus, whilst the reformation theologians were championing *agape* love over a narrowly understood *philia* love, the Kantian moral philosophy model established a discipline of ethics in terms of the moral agent as a rational, abstract, solitary individual who makes moral choices by a reflection that removes all particularity. The rational moral agent seeks the universal rule or principle that always applies in this situation or, better still, in all situations. In the Kantian frame, the moral life is that life which is true to a continual reflection upon the question: “What would be the duty of any rational being in this particular situation?” Iris Murdoch suggests that much contemporary moral thinking depends on this Kantian view of the individual as,

...rational and totally free.... He is morally speaking monarch of all he surveys and totally responsible for his actions. Nothing transcends him.... We no longer see man against a background of values, of realities which transcend him. We picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world. For the hard idea of truth we have substituted a facile idea of sincerity.¹³

Generally speaking, contemporary ethical theories fall under two main headings. There are theories which develop from *deontology*, which identifies moral reasons for action as those that are universalizable and impartial, and there are theories which develop as instances of *consequentialism*,¹⁴ according to which a moral agent does whatever action produces the greatest aggregate welfare for all human beings: universal benevolence. In either case, the partiality of friendship on the one hand, and its exclusivity on the other, makes friendship ethically problematical and suspect. As long as these Enlightenment notions of self and ethics were not seriously *challenged*, there was little interest in the notion of friendship.

This challenge came in the last quarter of the twentieth century when a *virtue* approach to ethics was promoted directly as the result of a critique of the understanding of the ethical life that has its roots in the Enlightenment. “Virtue ethics” proposes that the central concern of the moral life is the formation of a good and worthy character. The task of becoming a good person is dependent upon the development of virtues that will help guide us to the

13. Murdoch, I. “Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch,” in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed. S. Hauerwas and A. MacIntyre, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) 44.

14. Utilitarianism can be seen as an instance of consequentialism.

good life, happiness (*eudaimonia* = “the best possible life”¹⁵), or the life worth living. This development and growth in virtue requires relationships with people who share a common vision and desire of the good: our best and closest friends. We cannot acquire the virtues nor flourish in the virtuous life apart from our friendships. Firstly, in our friends, we have a mirror of our souls — we see ourselves in the other and we achieve a continual self-awareness and self-examination that can only come from trusting, open, honest communication and interaction. Secondly, the friend wishes happiness, “the good and fulfilling life,” for her friend, and in so doing becomes herself the person she wishes her friend to become. By seeking happiness or the ‘life worth living’ for one another, friends are transformed precisely into that “life worth living.”

Whereas the Kantian approach asked, “how should I act” or “what shall I do?” the virtue approach asks “how shall I live and how shall I become a person who lives in this way?”

The role of friendship in the modern ethical theory influenced by Kant is minimal, and even seen as an obstacle to the ethical life. The moral agent is not a person who has developed a moral character, but rather a person who is best able to act on abstract and universal principles of justice. The view of the moral self as purely rational implies that the emotional intimacy of particular friendship can provide no significant insight into one’s moral self. In virtue ethics, on the other hand, the development of the moral character is accomplished precisely through friendships. Thus in the return to a consideration of virtue ethics, friendship becomes necessary for the development of virtues as states of soul or character.

Thus has occasioned the return of interest in the understanding of friendship as constitutive of our very humanity. Descriptions of friendship from the ancients onward have been re-discovered and made popular again. The long standing overly simplistic and reformation objections to friendship that *philia* love is a lesser love than the ideal Christian *agape* love will no longer convince. Rather, we read in recent western literature that only in and through particular friendships of *philia* is *agape* love learned and achieved. Paul Wadell, a proponent of virtue ethics, puts it nicely:

... when friends are brought together by a mutual love for God and a desire to follow Christ, their friendship is a relationship in which they learn the ways of God, imitate Christ, and thus learn to embrace those they hitherto ignored. In this context, *agape* is not something other than friendship, but describes a friendship like God’s, a love of such generous vision that it looks upon all men and women not as strangers but as friends.¹⁶

As a proponent of virtue ethics, Stanley Hauerwas has argued for more than a decade that the Christian Church must become the type of community in which the demands of mutuality present in the highest friendships are to be discovered and nourished.¹⁷ In terms of the relation between *agape* and *philia*, Hauerwas says:

15. cf. Ackrill, J.L. “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, (California: University of California Press, 1980) 24. For Aristotle’s definition of *eudaimonia* as “final end” see his *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b1–7.

16. Wadell, P. *Friendship and the Moral Life*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989) 96.

17. In this discussion, of course, we are speaking consistently of friendships based on goodness and virtue. This is the third of the types of friendship described by Aristotle. The first two types of friendship are firstly, of pleasure and secondly, of usefulness. Aristotle says that “these two kinds are friendships only incidentally...” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156a).

...one might say that *philia* in the Christian church forms Christians to embody the love theologians have described as *agape*. ... it is not that that we Christians are formed by *philia* to become individuals who can individually practice *agape*. Rather it is that we are formed by *philia* in the church to become a community which in its corporate life in the world loves the world in the manner of *agape*, whose practice it has learned in seeking to conform itself to the God who is in Christ.¹⁸

In the communion of the Church we become friends with those who share a common vision of the Good, the Truthful, and the Beautiful. We do not grow in grace by acquiring “knowledge” about how we ought to live, but by the Spirit’s prompting we develop friendships within the Church in which we seek the fullness of Christ for the other. Thus the Christian is called to rebuke his friends in the church community, “... if your brother sins against you, go to him and tell him his fault” (Matthew 18.15). This text is immediately followed by Peter’s query as to how many times he should forgive his brother: “not seven times, but seventy times seven” (18.22). Rebuke of friends in the community of the Church is always within the context of love and forgiveness, desiring the very best for the other in Christ. St. Augustine wrote to his old friend Marcianus, rejoicing that Marcianus has become a catechumen, “and thus fully a friend” (*Ep* 258, 3).¹⁹ “Although you seemed to love me greatly,” says Augustine, “you were not yet my friend.” (*ibid*). Only when Marcianus became a catechumen did they have a united devotion to a shared vision of the good in which they would journey together and assist each other in the acquisition of virtues. Augustine points to the two great commandments of love of God and neighbour and writes to Marcianus, “If you with me will hold these two most firmly, our friendship will be true and everlasting and will unite us both with one another, and with the Lord himself” (*ibid*). In Aelred of Rievault’s 12th century treatise *On Spiritual Friendship* Aelred will intensify the previous teachings on Friendship by suggesting that the Tradition’s reflection on Scripture leads to the formulation “*Deus amicitia est*” [God is friendship].

But something more needs to be said about the nature of the *erotic* that is present in friendship love, especially in the light of our culture’s appropriation of the teaching of Freud at the beginning of the 20th century and his reduction of the erotic to the sexual.²⁰

I have suggested that the erotic was understood to be an element of friendship-love for the Ancient Greeks and Latins — Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, etc. At least as early as the third century of the Christian dispensation, Origen’s “fruitful alliance of Christian *agape* and Platonic *Eros*” ensured that the Christian mystical theology would embrace *eros* as accompanying both *agape* and *philia* love. Gregory of Nyssa says that *eros* is *agape* “stretched out in longing.” In his *Divine Names*, Denys the Areopagite in the sixth century sometimes suggests that *eros* is more divine than *agape*, and in the end simply says that the sacred writers regard *eros* and *agape* as having one and the same meaning. The erotic component of friendship love is clearly manifested in the continuing interest in and interpretation of the Song of Songs until the very end of the Middle Ages.

But, to continue a theme, the place of the *erotic* in the divine activity of creation and redemption, in the soul’s longing for God, and in human relationships generally, was largely devalued and put aside at the same time as friendship-love was devalued in the sixteenth century. Not surprisingly, in the mid-twentieth century erotic love

18. Hauerwas, S. and Pinches, C. *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) 82.

19. As cited by R.D. Crouse in “Love and Friendship in Medieval Theology: Aristotle, St Augustine, St. Thomas and Dante,” *Christian Friendship*, op. cit., 140, 141.

20. In the following discussion I am especially indebted to Sarah Coakley, “Pleasure Principles: Toward a contemporary theology of desire,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, vol 33, No. 2 (Autumn 2005) 20-33.

suffered an even worse trashing by Anders Nygren, than he had given to friendship-love. By now you can guess the movement of Nygren's critique: *agape* is the Christian love of Jesus in the New Testament — graced, God-given, sacrificial, downward-moving, unselfish. Nasty *eros*, “desire”, or “longing”, in contrast, is acquisitive, human-centred, upward moving, egocentric, and needy. For Nygren the erotic urge is frightening and alarming, entirely uncontrollable. Nygren's false characterization of both *philia* and *eros* has been shown by many. Sarah Coakley suggests that “... it is Anders Nygren's famous study of *Agape and Eros*, rather than the secular Freud, that has actually played a wider cultural role here than is normally recognized in undermining the efforts at a modern Christian theology of desire.”²¹ She rejects Nygren's misinterpretation of Freud that the erotic is to be understood only in terms of sexual attraction. Coakley locates in Freud's early writings the roots of the present sexualization of all forms of relationships in western culture, but she also traces a development in his writings that shows that Freud later came to define *eros* in much more traditional terms as the drive that presses toward the future and new life. In his later writings Freud assents explicitly to Plato's theory of the erotic “ascent” to Beauty in the *Symposium*. She argues that Freud did not at all counsel that the repression or sublimation of libido (physical, biological, sex drive) was necessarily harmful. In fact Freud argues that very often such repression of libido simply is necessary.

In her analysis of Gregory of Nyssa's *de virginitate* Coakley points out how Gregory recollects the positive role of *eros* in all human relationships. Gregory explains that all erotic desire, whether for the married or for the celibate, requires a proper channeling toward God through the disciplines of deep prayer and ascetic perseverance. A key point for Coakley is that these spiritual disciplines required for the proper and salvific channeling of desire are required for all Christians, whether married or celibate. She concludes:

Gregory's vision of desire as thwarted, chastened, transformed, renewed, and finally intensified in God, bringing forth spiritual fruits of *agape* and *leitourgia* [service to others, esp. to the poor] in a number of different contexts, represents a way beyond and through the false modern alternatives of repression and libertarianism, between *agape* and *Eros*, and has curiously more points of contact with the real Freud than the imaginary Freud of American popular consciousness.

To summarize thus far: lately there has been a renewed interest in philosophical and theological literature of the nature and role of friendship in contemporary political life generally, ethical thinking, and the Christian life of holiness. I began this paper with a look at Florensky's letter on friendship that gathered in many of the classical and Christian themes in the Tradition that have regained currency in the past several decades. Friendship love is inclusive of *eros*, *philia* and *agape*. It is the means by which we grow in virtue. For the Christian life it is the means by which we are made holy, by degrees. Thus we learn to live with a reality that we can't mould to our own purpose. Through the activity of friendship love within the community of the Church our lives are transformed and made capable of *agape* love of both friend and enemy. Christian friends look to their Lord who exemplifies the virtues consistent with divinity: both friends will seek, in common, to imitate their Lord and thus grow slowly into the character of God.

But within his discussion of friendship, Florensky also drew attention to the notion of formal “covenanted friendships” within the Christian tradition. In 1914 he spoke of the “indissolubility” of friendship, as strict, he says, “as the indissolubility of marriage.” Yet for Florensky these friendships, which would later be called ‘same-sex’ unions, though erotic, are not sexual in nature at all. The exchange of the crosses during the rite symbolizes the mutual *ascesis* or life of renunciation within the friendship. In this renunciation Florensky locates the essential difference between friendship and marriage. He says,

21. Coakley, 2005.

... marriage is “two in one flesh,” while friendship is two in one soul. Marriage is unity of flesh, *homosarchia*, while friendship is unity of souls, *homopsuchia*.²²

Now we turn directly to the question before The Anglican Church of Canada and ask how our consideration of friendship-love might contribute to the debate about the permissibility of same sex marriages in the Christian Church?

A dominant theme in modern American culture, expressed in many ways in Christian Churches, is that this friendship love is given its highest expression in marriage. As the hallmark wedding bulletin cover puts it: “*Today I will marry my best friend.*” But is friendship (or the “sanctification of friendship”) the essence of marriage? Is marriage but another particular form of friendship?

Some of the strongest Christian advocates for same-sex marriages describe marriage as a state of life in which gay or lesbian couples take life-long vows of monogamous fidelity so that they can grow in sanctification. Eugene Rogers argues in several articles that Christian theologians understand marriage only shallowly as the making licit of sexual satisfaction. Rather, Rogers insists that marriage is better understood as a state of life that provides opportunity for sanctification. Homosexual orientation is described as the inability of the gay or lesbian to experience the fullness of friendship-love in persons of the opposite sex. Gays and lesbians encounter the other (and thus discover themselves) in relation to persons of the same sex.²³ In fact Rogers eloquently describes how the married couple provide for one another the friendship-love that I have described in this paper, being a mirror for each other’s soul and “exposing and healing each other’s flaws over time.” Rogers tries to clinch his argument for same-sex marriage, “No conservative has yet seriously argued that gay and lesbian couples need sanctification any less than heterosexual ones. ... it is evil to attempt to deprive people of the means of their own sanctification.” In the light of our presentation of friendship-love I would say that Rogers presents a convincing argument that same-sex couples must not be deprived of the deep friendship that is required for their sanctification.

His conclusion follows, however, for same-sex *marriage* only if marriage is understood *solely* as a specific type of friendship. There is no doubt that in the Tradition of the Church friendship is an extremely important part of any Christian marriage. When children are involved, the parents must model, as much as they are given grace to do so, a friendship love that includes a fullness of *agape* and a positive and healthy affirmation of the erotic, directing the erotic in such a way that the Third person in every Christian relationship (God) is made present.

Further, there is no doubt that wonderful and grace-filled friendships of man/man and woman/woman have been present in the Christian Community throughout its history. It is not only a recent phenomenon for two Christian men or two Christian women to know the congruent grace of a romantic “falling in love” with one another and desiring to spend their lives together in joy and fidelity. But why is it only now that the Church is challenged doctrinally and pastorally to define these loving and grace-filled relationships as “marriage”?

The most common answer is that we now know more about the psychology of persons such that we have “discovered” that some/many men can only have the deepest emotional, physical, spiritual and romantic intimacy with other men, and likewise that there are some/many woman who can only know the joy of sharing their souls profoundly and intimately with other women.

22. Florensky, 325.

23. This particular claim is found in an unpublished article, “Marriage as a discipline of sanctification,” 2005. Rogers cites David M. McCarthy, “The Relationship of Bodies: A Nuptial Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Unions,” in *Theology and Sexuality*, 1998 4: 73-95. The other quotations in this paragraph are from the unpublished 2005 article.

But this “discovery” still begs the question. Why should the Church consider “marriage” to be the appropriate state of life for two Christian men or two Christian women who love each other deeply and commit themselves to lives of fidelity, intimacy and sacrifice for each other?

Ultimately, it is the church’s understanding of marriage that will determine whether marriage is the appropriate state of life for such grace-filled relationships. In what follows I suggest that the creeping sexualization of human relationships in the twentieth century that convinces us that we are “sexual beings” and that all relationships are ultimately sexual, has prompted the contemporary Church to begin to understand marriage in a way that deviates from the understanding of marriage as known in the Tradition of the Church. The Church has come to see marriage as a state of life intended for the living out of a profound, intimate and sexualized friendship. Intimacy has been confused with sexual expression such that the highest friendship is understood to require marriage because marriage is that state of life where the Church allows the type of sexual expression that nourishes and fulfills our deepest needs for intimacy and friendship love.

Recent changes to the Marriage Canon of The Anglican Church of Canada, and the marriage liturgy of *The Book of Alternative Services* reflect this shift in understanding and push The Anglican Church of Canada decidedly in the direction of same-sex marriages.

The solemn Declaration of 1893, the founding document of The Anglican Church of Canada, locates its formal doctrinal understanding of Christian marriage in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Its description of marriage is coherent with that of the history and tradition of the Church. There we read that there are three purposes of marriage: (1) “it was ordained for the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord;” (2) “it is a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication;” and (3) “it is for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other in both prosperity and adversity.” It should be noted that, in the second reason given for marriage, we still see the ancient Christian view that marriage is for those who not have “the gift of continency,” (i.e. virginity and the single life). Canada introduced its own Book of Common Prayer in 1918, outlining the same purposes but removing the reference to the gift of continency, happily replacing the language of “remedy for sin, and to avoid fornication” with the much more positive language of the “hallowing of the union betwixt man and woman.” In this articulation of the purpose of marriage friendship, the hallowing of the spiritual, emotional, psychological bond, and procreation, were all somehow related.

The Book of Alternative Services of 1985 introduced the most significant shift in an understanding of marriage in the Canadian Anglican context. Marriage is now described as being for: (1) “the mutual comfort and help;” (2) “that they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love;” and (3) procreation as optional.

This liturgy thus institutionalizes the notion that the relationship between the couple — the friendship — is the primary purpose of marriage. The optional character of procreation cannot be interpreted as an attempt to be pastorally for those who cannot have children for physical reasons of age, infirmity, impotency, etc. Rather, young people today are simply choosing not to have children — that marriage will not be open, morally or physically, to the procreation of children. The role of sexual activity is tied to procreation only as an option, but its primary role is to enrich the relationship itself. This new understanding of the purpose of marriage is reflected in the 1967 version of the Marriage Canon which gives as a purpose for marriage, “the creation of a relationship in which sexuality may serve personal fulfillment in a community of love.” In other words, the creation of a friendship in which “sexual intimacy” plays a significant part.

Thus the deepening and lifelong expression of profound Friendship becomes the sole purpose for marriage. It is thus little wonder, given this understanding, that when married couples feel that friendship dissolving, or not blossoming as they would like, they will think their marriage has come to an end. How else should they think? As “church” we have taught them to think in this way. In sincerity, in piety, with integrity, couples that do not develop or

sustain friendships in their marriages will get out of one marriage, and try another, and perhaps even another, until they find the friend and friendship in Christ that they seek.

This development of the understanding of marriage through liturgical development and revision of the Marriage Canon in The Anglican Church of Canada is consistent with (and encouraged by) shifts of thinking evidenced by successive Lambeth Conferences in the first half of the twentieth century. The 1908 Lambeth Conference referred to the “reverent use of the married state,” (Resolution 43) and the 1920 Conference to “the paramount importance in married life of deliberate and thoughtful self-control.” (Resolution 68) Both of these comments are related to the Conference’s rejection of birth control.

At the Lambeth Conference in 1930, however, the Anglican Church made a fundamental departure from the Christian moral tradition in matters of sex and sexuality when it shifted from the thinking of the previous two Lambeth Conferences and declared that there is a role for artificial means of birth control in the sexual relationships of married persons. Whether or not the participants of Lambeth 1930 understood the significance of their determination, certainly Pope Pius XI recognized that Lambeth 1930 represented a major departure from the tradition of the Church. His encyclical *Casti Connubii* (*Chaste Marriage*) can be interpreted as a direct response to Lambeth 1930. The encyclical reads in part:

54. ... Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.

56. Since, therefore, openly departing from the uninterrupted Christian tradition some recently have judged it possible solemnly to declare another doctrine regarding this question, the Catholic Church, to whom God has entrusted the defense of the integrity and purity of morals, standing erect in the midst of the moral ruin which surrounds her, in order that she may preserve the chastity of the nuptial union from being defiled by this foul stain, raises her voice in token of her divine ambassadorship and through Our mouth proclaims anew: any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin.²⁴

What Pius XI pointed out here is that at Lambeth 1930, *for the first time*, a church claiming to stand within the Christian moral tradition had explicitly and officially said that sexual intercourse in itself, as an act unrelated to procreation, is one of the goods of marriage.²⁵

24. The following paragraph is also interesting:

78. “These enemies of marriage go further, however, when they substitute for that true and solid love, which is the basis of conjugal happiness, a certain vague compatibility of temperament. This they call sympathy and assert that, since it is the only bond by which husband and wife are linked together, when it ceases the marriage is completely dissolved. What else is this than to build a house upon sand? — a house that in the words of Christ would forthwith be shaken and collapse, as soon as it was exposed to the waves of adversity ‘and the winds blew and they beat upon that house. And it fell: and great was the fall thereof.’ [59] On the other hand, the house built upon a rock, that is to say on mutual conjugal chastity and strengthened by a deliberate and constant union of spirit, will not only never fall away but will never be shaken by adversity.”

25. I am indebted to the Rev’d Eric MacDonald for this example, in an unpublished paper presented to a local Anglican Clericus meeting in Nova Scotia in 2005.

Almost two decades ago now the present Archbishop of Canterbury boldly reflected upon the Anglican Communion's approval of the use of contraception. His words are even more clearly truthful for a church that imposes no limits on the use of conception — i.e. a church that marries young people who intend to use conception to prevent any children being born within the marriage, and for whom sexual intimacy is solely for building and maintaining relationship, never open to procreation.

In a church that accepts the legitimacy of contraception, the absolute condemnation of same-sex relations of intimacy must rely either on an abstract fundamentalist deployment of a number of very ambiguous texts, or on a problematic and non-scriptural theory about natural complementarity, applied narrowly and crudely to physical differentiation without regard to psychological structures.²⁶

In the light of the current widespread teaching that marriage is the highest friendship, and that the role of sexual activity within marriage is formative, expressive and productive of that friendship (that the couple “may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love”) the argument of Eugene Rogers is sure. It is simply wrong to deprive same-sex couples of this highest form of friendship.

Likewise, it is little wonder that thoughtful, pious and sincere Anglicans should conclude that the type of covenanted same-sex friendships found in the Christian tradition (*adelphopoiesis*), is akin to same-sex marriage: either fully or pointing toward. Our culture has sexualized intimacy such that marriage has become the form of which all other friendships are lesser imitations. To suppose that these covenanted life-long brotherhoods and sisterhoods in the Christian Tradition were a grace-filled type of profound friendship that demonstrated *philia*, *agape* and erotic love but without sexual intimacy, is to see these relationships as “just short” of marriage. In our sexualized culture, these relationships are lacking something that could be provided if only they became full “marriages.”

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to suggest that friendship is necessary to becoming fully human. Friendship, in its very many forms and manifestations, is the means by which we grow in Christian virtue and holiness. Our friendship with God in Christ transforms our character such that we become holy, and our friendships with one another are part of that activity of the formation of this virtuous life. It is in this context that the whole question of same sex relationships must be understood. Christians should not be denied any of the forms of human friendship by which we come to know our holiness and communicate the character of God. Some forms of deepest friendships include the desire to live together in community, at least the Church community.

The Scriptures, as understood within the unbroken tradition of the Church, speak of marriage as a state of life in which a male and female couple enters into a relationship that is at least morally open to the possibility of the procreation of children. The married relationship is “outward looking” in that it is also for the sake of others: of the potential children to be born and raised within family. This relationship is permanent until the death of one or other of the married partners. It is a relationship that echoes the love that eternally binds together Christ and His Church. Thus marriage is not simply friendship even though it is a relationship in which there is every expectation that friendship love, inclusive of *philia*, *agape* and *eros*, should flourish.

26. Williams, R.D., ‘The Body’s Grace’, in *Theology and Sexuality*, Eugene Rogers (ed.) (England, Blackwell Publishing) 2002, pp 309-321, 320.

Finally, throughout the history of the Church, particular friendships that have developed between man/man and woman/woman have been recognized as such a means of God's grace that these friendships have been blessed, offered to God in prayer, and expressed in covenant form. Such friendships include living together in the light of God's presence and Love, sharing in a life of sacrifice for the other, and seeing one's soul mirrored in the other by which such friends grow in holiness. These friendships, (expressive of *philia*, *agape* and *eros*) reflect God's character and His Kingdom is made more real among us when we celebrate these friendships. If we *either* deny the reality of God's grace as expressed in this particular form of the highest of friendships, *or* if we equally deny these friendships by turning them into marriages, the Kingdom will be less present among us.

And thus the title of this paper: Friendship: the end of marriage. That is, if friendship is the end (the sole purpose) of marriage, then friendship is the end (the destruction) of marriage.