

“A Denomination Hungry for Reconciliation: Grace, Race and the PCA” by Sean Michael Lucas, *byFaith*, October 19, 2015;
“Tied in Knots: Americans Try to Redefine Marriage” by Alan Dowd, *byFaith*, October 12, 2015.

Even after the Civil War, in 1867, R. L. Dabney, a major Presbyterian theologian of the Old South, now considered a forebear of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), ended his 356-page “biblical” *defense of slavery and attack on abolition* by asserting: “Our people are now oppressed with present sufferings and a prospective destiny more cruel and disastrous than has been visited on any civilized people of modern ages. [But,] let the arrogant and successful wrongdoers flout our defence [*sic*] with disdain: we will meet them with it again, when it will be heard; in the day of their calamity in the pages of impartial history and in the Day of Judgment.” Evangelical historian Mark Noll notes: The slavery conflict “pushed theologians down the roads on which they were already traveling rather than compelling them to go in new, creative directions.” How typical!

Lucas, a PCA minister and Dabney scholar, reports that in 2002, PCA’s 30th General Assembly “named our sins from 1861-65 [but] not our more recent sins from 1961-65”. So, he calls the PCA to “confess our church’s covenantal and generational involvement in and complicity with racial injustice inside and outside of our churches during the Civil Rights era”. He argues: “Those recent sins of commission and omission – preventing blacks from worship in our congregations, ... ‘biblical’ defenses for segregation, defending White Citizens’ Councils ... need to be confessed and repented [so we can] see more clearly our own present-day failures to love our black brothers and sisters well and to use our positions and power to benefit them more than ourselves.” That, “too many (white) people ask, ‘Haven’t we confessed enough?’ and ‘Shouldn’t they confess too?’ demonstrates,” he says, “a general lack of understanding, imagination, and compassion”. Lucas admits: “It was disappointing to hear my fathers and brothers make arguments against the resolution. Not to know our history on these issues [is] not to be quick to recognize how they continue.” So, just how “hungry for reconciliation” is the PCA?

Outlawing slaves’ marriage and interracial marriage, and, even after *Loving v Virginia* (1967), ranting over race “mongrelizing”, now link to antigay rants propped up with *other* Bible verses. Lucas simply fails to note this link, but to Dowd, it’s not possible to connect these dots since he *blasts* marriage for *same-sex* couples. Once again, the *roots* are *culture-based* and stem from a self-righteous refusal to live Jesus’ Golden Rule.

Dabney’s views now disgust his Presbyterian heirs in the “pages of impartial history” he failed to foresee. Dowd’s views disgust many of his own evangelical contemporaries. All of this disgust reflects empathy freed from ignorance and outworn political agendas.

According to Genesis, the first human found no mate for himself among the beasts. But when given another *human*, out of his own body, he rejoiced: “At last! Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh!” Biblical scholars discern his words as, *literally*, an expression of joy over *kinship*, *not gender*. But Dowd reads *into* them an antigay argument, sneering anachronistically: “The text doesn’t say Adam and his husband.”

Reproduction required a *heterosexual* pair. Yet, *reflecting and governing* his use of Gen 1:27 at Gal 3:28, Paul alters his tri-part construction of the new humanity in Christ and cites Genesis’ “male and [*kai*] female” pair as now of no *theological* relevance. He even uses the *neuter* gender.

In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis sees that, in erotic love, what is

germane is not *gender* but the *other person* – *himself* or *herself*. Just any mere male or female won’t do. But Dowd’s materialism fixates on *genitals* while *real* couples home in with a *fascination* over *one another*. Genitals matter in rape, but rape is neither romance nor a marriage.

In ancient male-dominant honor/shame society, a “marriage” of *two males* would be *unthinkable* – one man’s subjugating another man as he’d control a woman, a piece of property?! Dowd notes: “As for homosexual marriage, it is simply not contemplated by the Bible”. And it isn’t! But this destroys *what he’s trying to prove*, i.e., that the Bible *condemns* same-sex marriage. He also sees that there are marriage arrangements “in God’s family tree” that are, to say the least, totally unacceptable to evangelicals today.

Today, both heterosexual and same-sex couples marry because they’re *in love*. Yet Dowd scoffs at marriage’s being “about love”, i.e., *romance*. It is true, of course, that *romantic* love, as known in the West since the Middle Ages, was *not* the experience in ancient cultures in which marriage was arranged for financial, social and political gain.

Dowd faults today’s “redefining” of marriage. But he’s a bit late. “Redefining” Bible era marriages evolved long ago, from patriarchal purchase deals, wives as chattel, wives by capture, child brides, sibling and incest marriages, polygyny, concubinage, levirate marriage, divorce at a husband’s whim, etc. Today’s evangelical views, expectations and customs on marriage aren’t what they were just one, let alone two or three, centuries ago.

Dowd does not think the “church should change” for the Bible “is the ultimate source of the truth.” But the Bible *led to change*, e.g., The Reformation and continuing revisions of “what the Bible says” on slavery, segregation, suffrage, male-only education, etc.

Against the fact that, “Jesus was silent on homosexuality”, Dowd offers only that Jesus opposed “sex outside of marriage [*sic*]”. Yet, Jesus *publicly* rebuked mobs of moralists and *privately, gently* counseled an adulteress they’d have stoned to death. Now, even *evangelical* brides and grooms are routinely less likely to be virgins than in former times.

Citing Jesus on a good tree’s bearing good fruit, Dowd knows of no such “good fruit” in the lives of loving same-sex couples. He should get to know them.

Stung by accusations of “hatred and intolerance”, Dowd claims he’s “about nothing more or less than” *Christian teaching*. But in 1955, Lewis knocked such rationalization as so “much hypocrisy”. Keenly sensing “a certain nausea” in these hypocrites, he said: “I think that of very little relevance to moral judgment. The real reason for all the pother [over homosexuality] is, in my opinion, neither Christian nor ethical.”

Christians resolved earlier disputes by reading Scripture more seriously and with God’s *general* revelation. Augustine: “A good and true Christian should realize that any truth is the Lord’s, no matter where it is found.” History, science and common sense inform our loving “with our minds”, as Jesus inserted into the Law. And Calvin, a hero to Dowd and the PCA in spite of burning a “heretic” at the stake, gave caution patterned after Paul: “It is no slight evil to quench the brightness of the gospel by laying a snare for consciences”.

