

Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe

By John Boswell

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Both highly praised and intensely controversial, this brilliant book produces dramatic evidence that at one time the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches not only sanctioned unions between partners of the same sex, but sanctified them--in ceremonies strikingly similar to heterosexual marriage ceremonies.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Boswell (Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality) has written a stunning, complex book that is demanding in the brilliance of its scholarship but written with sterling clarity. He offers a sophisticated interpretation of the concepts of love and friendship and the institution of heterosexual marriage, from the ancient Greeks and Romans through the Middle Ages, demonstrating that in the distant past there was not the link of love and marriage expected today. Relationships between men were as likely to be sanctified and consummated as heterosexual ones, and the documentary evidence presented shows that men set up households together in significant numbers. Material on women is sparse, Boswell notes, because most premodern historical sources were written by men, for men, about men; women figure in them either as property or as objects of sexual desire. The academic title is deceptive--the book offers vividly romantic depictions of love and friendship, and there isn't a dull page. Illustrations not seen by PW.
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From Library Journal
Not since Boswell's Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality (Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1981) have Christians of all creeds confronted a work that makes them look so closely at their notions of the relationship between the church and its gay and lesbian believers. Diligently researched and documented, this immensely scholarly work covers everything from the "paired" saints of Perpetua and Felicitas and Serge and Bacchus to lesbian transvestites in Albania. Examining evidence that the early church celebrated a same-sex nuptial liturgy, Boswell compares both Christian same-sex unions to Christian heterosexual unions and non-Christian same-sex unions to non-Christian heterosexual unions. Appendixes contain, among other things, translations and transcriptions of cited documents. Whether or not minds are changed on the matter will probably fall along sectarian lines, according to current attitudes on homosexuality. However, the work will provoke dialog. A groundbreaking book for academic, public, and theological libraries.
--Lee Arnold, Historical Society of Pennsylvania., Philadelphia
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From Booklist
When Boswell published his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* in 1980, he touched off a firestorm among antigay Christian and gay polemicists that rages to this day. He contended there was great tolerance and even acceptance of the unions of same-sex couples in premodern Europe. Indeed, actual rituals uniting such couples with the Christian church's blessing exist in the documentary record. In this long-gestated companion to his controversial landmark study, Boswell produces those rituals in translation, argues for how he has translated them, summarizes the histories of both heterosexual matrimony and same-sex unions in the Greco-Roman world, presents the views of early Christianity on heterosexual and same-sex couplings, traces the development of nuptial offices in the church, compares heterosexual and same-sex ceremonies of union, and discusses the checkered history of tolerance for same-sex unions during the Middle Ages. Throughout his presentation, three qualities predominate: lucidity in the writing; scrupulous scholarly documentation of factual statements and propositions (on many pages, more space is taken up by footnotes than main text); and great caution in distinguishing the sexual expectations of two-person relationships in ancient times from those presumed today--preoccupation with sex is very much a modern phenomenon. Although a rare book for the public library, it may, like its predecessor, be a vital one. *Ray Olson*

Users Review

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Do you have favorite book? In case you have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to understand everything in the world. Each book has different aim or even goal; it means that guide has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their time and energy to read a book. These are reading whatever they have because their hobby is definitely reading a book. How about the person who don't like looking at a book? Sometime, man or woman feel need book if they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you will need this Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe.

Teresa Propst:

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Barbra Poole:

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Heidi Garcia:

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