



# Same-Sex Relationships in the Life of the Church

Authors:

Dr. John E. Goldingay

Dr. Deirdre J. Good

Dr. Willis J. Jenkins

The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge

The Rev. Dr. Grant R. LeMarquand

Dr. Eugene F. Rogers

The Rev. Dr. George R. Sumner

The Rev. Dr. Daniel A. Westberg

Editor:

Dr. Ellen T. Charry

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This study document was presented to the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church at its spring meeting in March 2010. It has been edited in several places following the discussion. The responses of several pan-Anglican and ecumenical theologians will be added to this study in the summer, along with some further editing, before a final edition is published.



## PREFACE

For a generation and more the Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion have been engaged in a challenging conversation about sexual ethics, especially regarding same sex relationships in the life of the church. The hope of this work is that serious engagement in theological reflection across differences will build new bridges of understanding.

The Lambeth Conferences of 1988, 1998, and 2008 have urged the churches of the Anglican Communion engage in an intentional process of listening to the experience of gay and lesbian persons and exploring our pastoral ministry to them. There have been sharp disagreements. Communion has been strained. There have been repeated calls to listen carefully to one another, to undertake serious theological work and scriptural exegesis, and to repent of prejudice and injustice towards homosexual persons in church and society, as well as calls to uphold the classic teachings of the church on sexual ethics and marriage.

These two papers and responses are a contribution to this on-going process. This project was commissioned in the spring of 2008 by the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, to be overseen by the Theology Committee. The committee subsequently appointed a group of eight distinguished theologians to undertake the study. They represent a broad spectrum of viewpoint and intentionally include a variety of theological disciplines, gay and lesbian persons in committed relationships, and both single and married heterosexual persons. The panel has met several times since the fall of 2008, shared a number of papers, and engaged in sustained dialogue.

*Same-Sex Relationships in the Life of the Church* is their work. It is designed to be a distinctively theological document, bringing to bear on the questions before us careful scriptural exegesis enlightened by reason and the witness of the theological tradition. It seeks to be faithful to the Anglican way of searching for truth and seeking the mind of Christ.

All debates have at least two sides. Honest dialogue enjoins to listen to both viewpoints with genuine attention and respect. Such an approach has been employed by faithful Christian persons over the centuries, and is the way theological discernment is engaged by the church. Its purpose is both to encourage mutual understanding and to provide wise counsel to the church for its mission.

In this vein, after much conversation, the eight theologians formed two affinity groups consisting of four theologians each and have prepared two main papers. One adheres to what it understands to be the church's traditional ethical and sacramental teaching about marriage. The other revisits this teaching in order to call for the church's recognition of faithful, monogamous same-gender relationships. Each affinity group has then prepared a formal response to the other's work. Their study has been accomplished with a remarkable degree of mutual respect and charity.

The purpose of this project is not to create a new consensus or make a recommendation to the church. It is rather to express as fully as possible two contrasting theological views, both rooted in the teaching of the church and in Holy Scripture, in order that we might listen to and learn from both sides of the debate. In keeping with our Lord's parable about the scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of Heaven, the theologians have brought forth from their treasure what is new and what is old. (Matthew 13:52).

The Theology Committee is very grateful to our distinguished panel of theologians for their extraordinary and graceful devotion to this project. Very special thanks go to Dr. Ellen Charry, convener of the panel and editor of the work, and to the Rt. Rev. Joe Burnett, consulting bishop. We are indebted to the Rt. Rev. Pierre Whalon, Bishop in Charge of the Convocation in Europe, for suggesting that we undertake this study, for which he owes us all dinner in Paris one day.

A number of ecumenical and pan-Anglican theologians have agreed to read and comment on these papers. The final edition will include their contributions.

We offer this work to the church for reflection and response and in the hope that it will both help us live together more faithfully in the midst of difference and contribute to our corporate discernment in these matters. We trust that these papers will make all of us think carefully, regardless of our point of view.

In this, as in all things, may we have the "power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. . ." (Ephesians 3.18-19).

The Rt. Rev. Henry Nutt Parsley, Jr.  
Chair, Theology Committee of the House of Bishops  
Lent 2010

## **EDITOR'S FOREWORD**

This group was convened to offer a distinctively theological approach to the controversy before us. We acknowledged that our church's doctrinal foundations are the catholic creeds and we gave special attention to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that we recite at the celebration of the Eucharist. Further, we agreed that most of the doctrinal concerns raised by the controversy over same-sexuality cluster under the third article of the Creed on the identity and activities of the Holy Spirit. These include the sanctification of believers ("the Lord the giver of life), the authority of Scripture ("who has spoken through the prophets"), ecclesiology ("one holy, catholic and apostolic church"), and sacraments and sacramental rites.

Because the sexuality controversy is multi-layered, we realized that we could not address every aspect of it and organized our efforts around marriage. Marriage rather than same-sex blessings came to the fore because the former is lurking behind the latter. Gay marriage is currently contested in California, and legal in Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont and is being considered in Mexico City and the District of Columbia in the US. It is legal in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden. The question of the definition of marriage is also before the churches.

In making these decisions we realize that our perspectives may not reflect the thinking of all Episcopalians. Our assignment, however, was not to express the mind of the church but to offer to the church theological terms for discussing the matter at issue and to look ahead at some implications of various courses of action that might be taken. We are not offering our work as a way forward. We are not offering a compromise position that might put the dispute behind us so that we move ahead together. We are offering two interpretations of creedal faithfulness that disagree. What we are doing—and on this we agree—is offering a word to the Episcopal Church, that it and the Communion may grapple a bit more sharply with important doctrinal questions embedded in the debates and their practical consequences a bit more sharply. Our work means to stimulate an ever-clearer grasp of the issues at stake.

Within our creedal framework, we came upon some surprises. Some of us came to the table thinking that the disagreement is about sexual ethics or perhaps pastoral care. Some came with a practical approach; contextual changes in the culture mean that some theological changes should be made by the church to adapt to changing circumstances. Some came thinking that the central issue is hermeneutical—what guidelines do we follow for interpreting Scripture.

The creedal orientation of our work, however, pressed us to locate all these presuppositions under the authority of the "deposit of faith" that sustains the Church in obedience to its Lord. By no means does this mean that the deposit of faith is inured to change, only that the terms on which change is considered be consonant with the historic faith. To put it sharply, we agreed that theology based on the Creed sets the terms for considering extra-theological perspectives that bear on the matters at hand. Neither modern science nor high-minded values, nor personal experience can authorize changes

in Christian doctrine but change must be interpreted and treated within logically prior commonly agreed upon creedal categories.

Christian belief and practice are not like a Kandinsky painting that can be thought of as right side up no matter which direction one may view it. To put this in terms of the three-legged Anglican stool, if Scripture and tradition constitute the deposit of faith, reason's contribution—that includes philosophy, science, culture and experience—will be reviewed within the purview of the other two legs of the stool in the process of reasoned theological argumentation.

As the reader will see, we did not arrive at two symmetrical documents with each side addressing common questions. This is partly because each affinity group came at the issue with different purposes, needs, and perceptions of audience. The work of the traditionalists was overtaken by events in the midst of their work in the summer of 2009. The decisions of the Episcopal Church's General Convention relating to this issue, and the approval of ordination of clergy living in same-sex relationships by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, pressed the conservatives to frame their work in terms of the precise context in which they now found themselves. Their document took a less doctrinal turn as they not only framed the global context within which they locate themselves but also laid forth their position through doctrinal development, hermeneutics, natural law, and the scientific evidence surrounding homosexuality.

The liberal document takes a quite different approach. It is a bold doctrinal proposal to expand the scope of marriage to include same-sex couples. The argument is that homosexual persons need the sanctification of life that marriage offers no less than heterosexual persons do and that the Church should not withhold from them oversight of sexual holiness but use the means of grace offered in its marriage rites to support them in their life in Christ.

A difficult issue that accosted us is the unity of the church. Whether the ordination and marriage of homosexual persons is a church dividing issue was not one that we sought to address but one that we finally could not avoid. There are two ways of understanding "church dividing." On a practical level, it is clear that this controversy is causing division in the church, both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. The creation of the Anglican Mission in America (now Anglican Mission) in 2000, under the auspices of the Province of Rwanda, and of the Anglican Church in North America, formalized in 2009, attest to the division among us.

Normatively speaking, however, the question is whether the movement of the Episcopal Church away from some classic doctrine and practice—as in ordaining non-celibate homosexual persons—warrants ecclesial division on doctrinal grounds. Does that practice, and now possibly the ecclesiastical marriage of homosexual persons, constitute a doctrinal challenge to the integrity of the faith sufficient to warrant division? Although neither ordination nor marriage are dominical sacraments, sacramental theology would need to be considered in order to ascertain clearly what is at stake ecclesially, pneumatologically and pastorally in fresh applications of ordination and marriage.

What looks to some as leaving the church is to others being left by the church. If, for example, it is the Holy Spirit who is leading the Church in this new direction, those who demur would be disobedient by remaining faithful to the tradition that they believe to be true, and, in the case of the ordained, that they promised to uphold and honor. It would be ironic if a move to include the disenfranchised effectively disenfranchised others.

Perhaps more discussion on what constitutes a church-dividing issue is warranted. Marriage may not be a core doctrine of the faith—equal in honor with the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, or even with the dominical sacraments—but the liturgical blessing of the newly married couple in the Book of Common Prayer, 1979 (p. 430), does have an epiclesis, indicating that the celebrant calls for the Holy Spirit to bless the marriage. From this vantage point, one issue is pneumatology, as our discussions bore out.

At this point, a word on nomenclature is in order. As is the case with many controversial topics, language is a sensitive issue here. For example, because the word ‘Jew’ has been used derogatorily, some Christians preferred ‘Jewish person’ or ‘person of the Mosaic persuasion’ or some other euphemism to distance themselves from denigration. Today, such circumlocutions sound quaint. In our case, various terms have been used and rejected as sensibilities have been recognized and addressed over the course of the decades.

We have generally settled on the terms traditional and liberal to designate the two positions taken here. At times, we have used the term conservative as a synonym for traditionalists, and revisionist, progressive, and expansionist as synonyms for liberal. Among ourselves, we have been comfortable with all these terms. Realizing, however, that there will be readers with various sensibilities, there may be no nomenclature that will appeal universally. Still, we have used several of these terms as they help us cultivate the self-reflective spirit and openness to other sensibilities at which our work aims.

In sum, this offering responds to the call for the Episcopal Church to treat the controversy theologically, and we interpreted that call to invite doctrinal analysis that is first faithful to the Creed, the foundation of the Church’s unity, and that interprets Scripture within that framework. Some readers may be unfamiliar with theological terms that generally presuppose formal theological training. We, however, are executing the charge that was given to us in the framework in which most of us have been professionally trained. Indeed, we all agree that our professional scholarly and theological training is to be used in service to the church and not only for the sake of advancing knowledge for its own sake. We invite a patient reading of our work that it may be a constructive contribution to what is now a decades-long controversy. In terms of theological controversies, that is not very long, but to those caught in it it can seem an eternity.

Editor, Ellen T. Charry  
Ash Wednesday, 2010  
Princeton Theological Seminary



# **Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology:**

## **A View from the Traditionalists**

**John E. Goldingay, Fuller Theological Seminary**  
**Grant R. LeMarquand, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry**  
**George R. Sumner, Wycliffe College, Toronto, Canada**  
**Daniel A. Westberg, Nashotah House**

### **Part 1**

#### **The Social and Ecclesiastical Context**

Modern western societies in North America and Europe are increasingly moving towards the acceptance of same-sex relationships. At first people were challenged to accept lesbian and gay partnerships on a political and legal level; but recently and more problematically, Christians are being asked to accept a redefinition of the institution of marriage itself. No longer is marriage to be regarded, in its essence, as a bond between one man and one woman, but as a sexual relationship in which two men or two women may also be committed to each other, and ought to be recognized to have the corresponding rights of support, parenting, adopting, inheriting, divorcing, and the other privileges and obligations which spouses in a marriage have had the right to expect.

We recognize that a remarkable shift in public opinion has occurred in the last thirty years or so in the aftermath of the so-called sexual revolution. Several European countries, including traditional Catholic societies such as Spain, as well as a number of American states have either passed legislation to allow same sex marriage, or have had their courts rule that restricting marriage to heterosexuals is unjust. It is not at all surprising that many Christians who live in areas where these social developments have progressed furthest should attempt to harmonize the attitudes and practice of their churches with those principles of fairness, tolerance, and compassion that are the supporting moral features of the acceptance of same-sex marriage.

If we were assessing simply the drift of European and North American societies, and the Anglican churches there, the picture would be discouraging for conservatives because of the apparent strength of liberalism. However, we remind ourselves that the Anglican Communion as a whole is much more solidly biblical and traditional than the western liberal portion of it, and that the opposition we express in this paper to same-sex marriage is in fact the dominant position of worldwide Anglicanism. Further, we take courage from reflecting on the fact that a slide into lax sexual morals (characteristic of the last fifty years in the west) may be reversible, just as England witnessed a reversal of libertine views of sexual behavior in the seventeenth and again in the nineteenth centuries.

In recent years, the Anglican Communion has struggled with the issue of homosexuality in different contexts, including the Lambeth Conferences (at least since 1988), meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council, and Primates' Meetings. The growing acceptance

of homosexuality in the western sections of the Communion created a context in North America in which the consecration in 2003 of Gene Robinson as the Bishop of New Hampshire in the USA, and the decision by the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada to bless same-sex unions seemed legitimate developments. But much of the rest of the Communion has not shared the conviction of the need to accept same-sex blessing or marriage, so that the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada find themselves torn between a sizeable liberal body in favor of accepting a revised view of sex and marriage, and large swaths of the Anglican Communion solidly opposed.<sup>1</sup>

Ecumenical relations between Anglicans and other denominations are a very mixed bag. Some national churches in Europe (such as the Swedish Lutherans), have predictably reflected the prevailing acceptance of modern secular views on sexuality and marriage, and opted for a “gender-neutral” definition of marriage for church weddings. We note, however, that the recent steps taken by the Church of Sweden have received some rebuke by the leadership of the Church of England.<sup>2</sup>

Until recently, only a few churches in the United States, mainly weaker and shrinking groups such as the Unitarians and United Church of Christ, had taken the more liberal path on same-sex marriage. By the end of the summer of 2009, however, the scene changed considerably with the passage by a two-thirds majority of voters at the August 2009 meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America of a resolution allowing Lutheran clergy living in same-sex relationships to be ordained and minister in that denomination. It has to be admitted that this development among the Lutherans, with whom the Episcopal Church has close ties, strengthens, *prima facie*, the credibility of the liberal direction in the Episcopal Church.

On the other hand, it is very clear that other church bodies with which we have nurtured special links because of a common understanding of theology, sacraments, and ordination, namely the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, are distancing themselves from the Anglican Communion on this issue. There is also a vast range of evangelical and Pentecostal churches that differs sharply from the liberal direction in the Episcopal Church. Although some of other so-called “mainline” churches in North America (e.g., Presbyterians and Methodists) have also been moving in a liberal direction, it is not at all clear whether they will be following the example of the Episcopal Church (and alienating their conservative and evangelical constituencies which tend to be larger than ours), or perhaps becoming more cautious about accepting same-sex marriage.

A major problem for liberals in the west has been the negative response to the American

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<sup>1</sup> It is very likely that if Canada and the USA had not acted first, then certain similar events in Great Britain, Australia, or New Zealand, for example, would have sparked the debate and crisis.

<sup>2</sup> See the letter of 26 June 2009 to the Archbishop of the Church of Sweden from the Council for Christian Unity, The Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of England Archbishops’ Council, pointing out that the steps taken by the Swedish Church appear to be “a fundamental re-definition of the Christian doctrine of marriage and of basic Christian anthropology.” The document may be found at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/ccu/europe/notices/replytoabsweden>. The recent approval of clergy with same-sex partners by the ELCA leaves the Church of Sweden less isolated.

and Canadian innovations on homosexuality from Anglicans in the global south. Churches like the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada have long considered themselves sensitive and responsive to issues of racism, injustice, and poverty and they have taken pains over the years to operate as partners in mission with African, Asian and Latin American churches, working for development, education, and peace in so many troubled spots in the world.<sup>3</sup> Some liberals appear to have been deeply wounded because those in the global south who also believe in justice and peace have not been willing to accept North American positions on sexuality. In fact, well before the Lambeth Conference in 1998 (at which the vast majority of bishops of the Communion voted in the now-famous Lambeth I.10<sup>4</sup>), there was a re-statement of the traditional Christian position on sexuality which both saddened and angered many liberals. This was the second Anglican North-South Encounter, meeting in Kuala Lumpur, which warned that the adoption of liberal policies on blessing same-sex unions and ordaining practicing homosexual persons would be both inconsistent with Scripture and would have damaging consequences for relationships within the Communion.<sup>5</sup>

It should not have been surprising, therefore, that the non-western response to the announcement by the Diocese of New Westminster that they would go ahead with plans to bless same-sex unions, and to the election, ratification, and consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire, has been widely negative. Various provinces of the Communion have attempted to express their displeasure with the North American churches in differing ways. Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda, for example, have attempted to cut all ties with the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada.<sup>6</sup> Some have declared themselves “out of communion” or in a state of “impaired communion” with the North American churches, without spelling out the exact implications of what these terms imply. Some have refused to accept money that is tied to the American and Canadian church bodies, or have refused to accept missionaries from them. Primates from some Anglican churches have refused to participate in eucharistic fellowship with primates from Canada and the USA at Primates Meetings; and some provinces, of course, boycotted the Lambeth Conference in 2008. Other churches (Southeast Asia, the West Indies, and the Sudan, for example) have attempted to express

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<sup>3</sup> Whether the perception of North American Anglicans has matched the reality on the ground is controverted. Willis Jenkins, for example, has argued that one of the reasons that non-western Anglicans have responded so negatively to western Anglican innovations is that Episcopalians in the US, especially “liberals/progressives” have retreated from “international companionship.” See, “Episcopalians, Homosexuality, and World Mission,” *Anglican Theol. Review* 86/2 (Spring, 2004): 293-316.

<sup>4</sup> The Anglican Communion maintains an archive of all Lambeth Conference resolutions. For Lambeth I.10 see, <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm> Accessed April 21, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> For the “Second Trumpet from 2nd Anglican Encounter in the South, Kuala Lumpur 10-15 February 1997” see, [http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/second\\_trumpet\\_from\\_2nd\\_anglican\\_encounter\\_in\\_the\\_south\\_kuala\\_lumpur\\_10\\_15/](http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/second_trumpet_from_2nd_anglican_encounter_in_the_south_kuala_lumpur_10_15/). Accessed November 19, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> We say, “attempted” because relationships between provinces of the Communion exist on many levels. A primate or even a house of bishops in one province may declare that their church is no longer in relationship with another church; it does not necessarily follow that all relationships cease. Ties may continue to exist between dioceses, between theological institutions, between members of international commissions, and between individuals.

their opposition to the North American churches by calling for repentance but stopping short of declaring that they are out of communion with the wayward churches in Canada and the USA.

All of these efforts to express displeasure, to declare that communion has indeed been broken, impaired, or endangered, are, as far as Anglicans in the non-western world are concerned, attempts to say that it is the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada that have put the Communion in danger by their actions. Most of the declarations by non-western bishops and synods announcing impaired or broken communion explicitly lay blame for the schism at the feet of the North American churches. The more moderate Diocese of Egypt said of the North American provinces that “by their actions, they have chosen to step out of communion with the Anglican Communion.” The (then) Archbishop of Central Africa wrote, “...you have broken our fellowship. To sit with you and meet with you would be a lie.”<sup>7</sup> They believe that their responses are not acts of schism, but attempts to come to grips with the fact that the North American churches have been the ones who have broken communion. Many Anglican Christians in the global south believe that to go forward in fellowship as if nothing had happened would be dishonest, damaging to their Christian witness in their own countries, and harmful to conservative Anglican Christian witness in the west.

The suggestion by some that the non-western reaction is primarily prompted by American conservatives is condescending, implying that Anglicans in the southern hemisphere have been manipulated, and lack independence of thought.<sup>8</sup> Numerous factors are involved in the varying degrees of fracture between the North American churches and the non-western churches.<sup>9</sup> Non-western Anglicans have mentioned several issues at stake. One is that the new positions of the American churches violate traditional modes of Anglican discernment. In addition, it seems clear to most African, Asian, and Latin American Anglicans that Scripture does not support the new positions. Tradition obviously does not

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<sup>7</sup> A listing of some of the statements issued after Robinson’s consecration by Anglican leaders from around the world can be found in Chris Sugden’s paper given to the Lambeth Commission entitled, “What is the Anglican Communion For?” at note 19. The paper can be found on the Anglican Communion website: <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/documents/200402whatisitfor.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> Miranda Hassett (no conservative herself) has made a careful and judicious study of the relationship between some American conservatives and their African counterparts in the midst of this controversy. See, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their African Allies Are Reshaping Anglicanism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Many observers highlight the rift between the North America churches and the African churches. Although there is an element of truth to this way of describing the situation, it is not so clear-cut. Not all African churches have declared broken communion as clearly as have Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria. The Primates of West Africa and Tanzania were both present at GAFCON, and have expressed displeasure, but have not spelled out the implications as strongly. The Indian Ocean, Burundi, the Sudan, and the Congo seem to have more hope that the Anglican Covenant proposed by the Windsor Report and now in its third draft may heal divisions. On the other hand, the Southern Cone (a Province in South America) seems closer to Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria in its response. Asian provinces have expressed a variety of (mostly negative) reactions, but have yet to declare communion to be broken. It would be a mistake to lay the blame on “Africa” as many have done—the vast majority of the global south provinces oppose North American innovations. Most non-western Anglicans agree with the Windsor Report that the Anglican Communion has been damaged by North American actions.

align with this innovation, and most non-western observers have a hard time seeing how reason, either, would support homosexual practice. Add to this that all four of the Anglican “Instruments of Unity,” or “Instruments of Communion” have affirmed the requested moratoria, and most non-western Anglicans are left convinced that the liberal argument is without merit.

Before July 2009, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the central leadership of the Church of England were loath to be too critical of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada, in the interests of maintaining the bonds of communion. But with the resolutions taken at the General Convention and the evident determination of the leadership of the Episcopal Church not even to agree to a delay in their agenda, the reality of the walking apart from the rest of the Communion by the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada became too clear to deny. Archbishop Rowan Williams pointed out the question at issue:

It is about whether the Church is free to recognize same-sex unions by means of public blessings that are seen as being, at the very least, analogous to Christian marriage. In the light of the way in which the Church has consistently read the Bible for the last two thousand years, it is clear that a positive answer to this question would have to be based on the most painstaking biblical exegesis and on a wide acceptance of the results within the Communion, with due account taken of the teachings of ecumenical partners also. A major change naturally needs a strong level of consensus and solid theological grounding. This is not our situation in the Communion. Thus, a blessing for a same-sex union cannot have the authority of the Church Catholic, or even of the Communion as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Further, the influential Bishop of Durham, N. T. Wright, who has also hitherto taken pains to attempt a balanced view of controversial statements and developments in the interests of preserving the integrity of the Communion, has pointed to the need to accept the reality of the divergent paths within the Anglican Communion indicated by Rowan Williams’ reflections:

the resolutions that were passed [at the Episcopal Church’s General Convention, 2009] clearly had the effect (a) of reminding people that the way was in fact open all along to the episcopal appointment of non-celibate homosexuals, and (b) of reminding people that rites for public same-sex blessings could indeed be developed. The Archbishop of Canterbury is now clearly if tacitly saying, throughout the document, that there is no reasonable likelihood, at any point in many years to come, that the Episcopal Church will in fact turn round and embrace the *moratoria ex animo*, still less the theology that underlies the Communion’s constant and often-repeated stance on sexual behaviour. Nor is there any reasonable

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<sup>10</sup> See “Communion, Covenant, and our Anglican Future,” at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2502>, accessed Aug 18, 2009.

likelihood that the Episcopal Church will in fact be able to embrace the Covenant when it attains its final form a few months from now. The Reflections deal with that reality.<sup>11</sup>

A divide has now developed between the western, largely liberal Anglican provinces (with important conservative sections) of the Communion and the more traditional, non-western global south; and the acceptance of same-sex marriage is merely one of the issues revealing the divide. There are exceptions: some high profile, non-western Anglicans such as Desmond Tutu, support gay rights on the same basis on which they worked for the rights of blacks in South Africa and for an end to apartheid. From their perspective it seems that homosexuals are an oppressed group in need of liberation from prejudice and oppression, and so they would argue (from Exodus and other biblical texts), that Christians ought to side with those seeking equal rights for homosexual persons.

The liberation argument can cut more than one way, however. Numerous church leaders, especially in Africa, see the move to approve homosexual marriage as in itself just one more example of western imperialism. The non-western world has long had to live with economic, political, and social agendas being set by rich and powerful “developed” nations. Foreign aid, for example, has often come with military and political strings attached. The current dispute looks to them uncomfortably like an ecclesiastical form of cultural imposition. Many in the global south see the story which governs the church in North America not as the biblical narrative, but as a modernist story in which, just as the World Bank has been able to define what economic systems should look like in order to supply loans and aid, so the developed Christian world thinks it is in the position to define the nature of progress and well-being for other societies, and to force the acceptance of that understanding onto the rest of the world. So, rather than the Anglican ideal being measured by the attractive-sounding ideals of “mutual responsibility and interdependence in the body of Christ,”<sup>12</sup> the churches of the West act as if they are better able to discern God’s will than their sisters and brothers in the rest of the Communion. When Western church leaders claim that their stand is “prophetic,” or that the Spirit is leading them into this new understanding, the church leaders of the global south immediately ask the epistemological question: “How do you know this? On what basis can you claim to have been given this new revelation? Is it not your wealth and power (and the habits and assumptions which naturally accompany them) that enable you to press this argument?”

Conservatives in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada feel a certain dismay at this point in the development of the issues and the crisis in the church. In spite of the lack of clarity on the issue of same-sex attraction on the part of biological and social scientists, and in spite of the wounds caused in much of the rest of the Anglican Communion, and in spite of the clear opposition of Scripture, our leadership is confident

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<sup>11</sup> Available at <http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2009/07>, accessed Aug 18, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> See, E.R. Fairweather (ed.), *Anglican Congress 1963: Report of Proceedings* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1963).

enough of its understanding of the issue to refuse even a modest delay before proceeding in the same way that secular society is going.

We realize that many leaders of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada see this as the kind of litmus test of moral sensitivity and courage. Slavery was such an issue in the early nineteenth century in the England of Wilberforce, and remained an issue much longer for leaders in the United States. And there have been social and reform movements, such as women's rights, the rights of workers to safety and minimum wages, not to mention the civil rights movement of the 1960s, when many in the Episcopal Church were socially conservative, protective of the prerogatives of the establishment and of men in power, and thus hesitant to join a movement which seemed to have unwelcome social and political features, and where it seemed easier and more "prudent" to wait.

We believe that there are a number of Episcopal bishops in 2009 who may well have some conservative reservations about moving ahead with same-sex marriage, and are sensitive to the considerations listed above; and yet they lend their support to revisionism, perhaps because they are afraid of being like the two Episcopal bishops in Alabama in 1963 who joined with six other local churchmen in writing an open letter to Martin Luther King, Jr., criticizing him for disobeying established laws and for not having patience to wait for change in civil rights to develop gradually and naturally.<sup>13</sup> We believe that many of our leaders would have done well to be more hesitant on moving forward on the issue of same-sex marriage, however. At the heart of our position is the conviction that the issue of same-sex marriage simply cannot be put in the same category as other social issues on which Anglicans and Christians in general have changed their mind. We do not believe that acceptance of gay and lesbian marriage fits neatly into some narrative of successive liberation movements that emancipated serfs, slaves, child laborers, blacks, and now homosexual couples.

When we consider some of the moral issues on which the Church (speaking broadly) has changed its thinking and practices over the centuries, what emerges is not so much a general pattern as the more difficult requirement to consider the rationale for change in an issue-by-issue fashion, and not on the basis of some template of "progress." Such issues as slavery, capital punishment, usury, divorce, just war, the role of women in society, and (more particularly) the ordination of women to office in the church, as well as others, need to be analyzed and thought through on both biblical and philosophical lines. This takes some careful work, as each issue has its own rationale, pattern of biblical material and its interpretation, and its own distinctive relationship to science and philosophy. When this is done, the case for same-sex marriage does not have the same kind of biblical support and philosophical rationale as women's ordination and a moderate divorce policy have, for example.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> And of course it was King's famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" that pointed out that some laws are unjust of their very nature and need to be changed rather than being put up with indefinitely.

<sup>14</sup> The very fact that some prominent denominations such as the Southern Baptists have in recent years shifted from the acceptance of women clergy to opposing them shows that the overall biblical teaching is ambiguous and can support both sides.

On divorce, Roman Catholic experts argue that there are good arguments for modifying the view of divorce along the lines of changes in human rights and economic policy; see John T. Noonan, *A Church*

Conservative Anglicans in modern western countries are well placed to take part in this communion-wide analysis and discussion, since they have a stake in both camps, and might be able to function, if not as a bridge that unites, then as a kind of interpreter of each side to the other. They have usually been trained at the same seminaries and have been fostered by the same modern cultures as the more liberal leaders in America and Europe. They understand the pressures and logic behind this development and can to some extent agree and sympathize with it: fairness, compassion, and individual rights are strong moral principles, and compelling forces for change. However, conservatives also share the scepticism voiced by non-western church leaders about the agenda of modern liberals, because so often the attitudes toward a revision of traditional views of sex and marriage are linked with liberal views of biblical authority, theological heterodoxy, and a general tendency to water down the basis and nature of Christian attitudes and way of life. This would generate a Christianity that, by not being counter-cultural enough, becomes unfaithful to the Gospel.

We offer a reflection on tradition. In one sense, the force behind tradition favors current practice, and is against change that is arbitrary or without good reason. In another sense, however, tradition should not have very much force at all if we are considering the case of an institution—including the church!—seeking to rectify a mistake in its understanding. The prohibition of usury, for example, was held for centuries, and came to be seriously questioned both on the adequacy of the interpretation of the few scriptural texts that were thought relevant, and of the philosophical understanding provided by Aristotle on the nature of money. In that case, the evidence to decide the issue comes from reason and Scripture, and not from tradition. In other words, the challenge to change the canon law on usury could not be answered simply by appealing to the many centuries when the prohibition was accepted. Galileo and Darwin could not be answered by appealing to how long the opinions on a geo-centric universe or a recent creation were held—if there is genuine error involved, then of course, it is time for the traditional view to give way.

The basis for conservative resistance to the liberal agenda, then, cannot simply be an appeal to the long-standing tradition of opposition, but must use a strong combination of reason, and Scripture. We apply the framework that Richard Hooker brought to bear on items of contention during the reformation and its aftermath in England. Where the more radical (Puritan) reformers alleged that policies and officials of the church and liturgical practices required scriptural warrant, Hooker articulated a valuable Anglican approach. Where practices and institutions develop in accordance with reason and tradition, and when they *are not in contradiction with Holy Scripture*, then there is no requirement to abolish such understandings and practices (such as church vestments, hierarchical ministry, and so on). While it may be possible on grounds of justice (in a modern sense) to argue in favor of same-sex relations, it would be in contradiction to the teaching of Scripture, and it would be in contradiction to the guidance from reason which Hooker

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*that Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 161-190.

For a general approach and explication of the details of exegesis which underlie a position like ours which accepts women's ordination and some use of divorce, but does not accept same-sex marriage see Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), esp. chapters 1, 15, and 16.



articulated in his understanding of natural law. Though tradition and reason carry weight, they are, finally, not on the same level as Scripture, which must be deemed the decisive factor. In the following sections of this document, we will set forth our position and articulate its basis in Scripture and in relation to scientific knowledge and the philosophical approach of natural law.

## Part 2

### The Witness of Scripture

The main factor that distinguishes Anglican conservatives is treating the Bible as uniquely authoritative for basic Christian belief and practice. The strong reluctance that we have to set aside what we consider Scripture's direct meaning may well be the single most important factor in the opposition of Anglican conservatives to the acceptance of same-sex marriage.

We are aware that a strong appeal to scriptural authority invites the charge of fundamentalism, but as we make clear in what follows, we accept critical principles in textual interpretation, and the accusation of "fundamentalism" all too often becomes a rhetorical term to dismiss traditionalist arguments, just as "homophobic" is often used as a short-cut to silence or even demonize those who do not agree with same-sex marriage and the concerns of the gay and lesbian community.

#### *Interpreting the Bible: Ancient Text and Contemporary Message*

The process of interpreting the Bible involves reading an ancient text in a contemporary context, establishing a kind of dialogue between very different cultures and life situations. It is awareness of *both* of these situations—the ancient and modern—and properly balancing them that enables the biblical message to be clearly understood and applied.

Pre-modern interpreters might seem naïve to us, but they took the canonical text to be answering questions that arose in their own context and were not concerned with the questions of different cultural situations. The same phenomenon occurs in western art of the Middle Ages or Renaissance: in a scene of the annunciation, nativity, or crucifixion of Christ, for example, the landscape, architecture, and clothing, are taken from the milieu of the artist, not from what they thought the scenes and figures would have *really* looked like in first-century Palestine. In fact, it would not have occurred to the artists or their public that "historical accuracy" was part of the task of artistic description of a past event.

The pre-modern reading of Scripture often resulted in a search for symbols, hidden meanings, and allegorical interpretations, such as reading the *Song of Songs* as a poetic description of Christ and his love for the Church. Pre-modern interpreters thus discovered inspiration and sometimes deep theological insight, although we might say that they sometimes imposed their own concerns onto the text, assuming continuities that did not

always exist, and even missing some meanings and emphases in the text that did not fit their own framework.

Modern biblical interpretation developed with the scientific approach of the Enlightenment; it tried to avoid the assimilation of the two contexts, the ancient text and contemporary life. Its aim was an “objective” interpretation, one that understood the text in its own right, and developed the resources to accomplish this: linguistic studies, archaeology and history, comparative religion, and so on. The exegetical task was primary. After exegesis, the interpreter (such as the preacher with a homiletic task) might go on to reflect on possibilities of contemporary application, but it was understood that the “real meaning” of the text stemmed from the objective, exegetical work, and not from subjective interpretation.

Although ideally this modern type of interpretation would better respect the text itself, it all too easily deceived itself about its capacity to distance itself from its own concerns and agenda. Just as pre-modern interpretation did, so modern historical criticism also looked for answers to its own questions, namely, those concerning the text’s historical origins. Then it simply assumed that providing such information (for example, that a certain passage in Exodus comes from a P source rather than J or E) was of primary importance in discerning the text’s significance for us. Such historical exegesis tended to produce tedious commentaries that often lacked theological insight. However, could we have the advantages of pre-modern interpretation (theological coherence and spiritual richness) and of modern interpretation (historical accuracy) without their respective disadvantages?

There are two moves involved in biblical interpretation. One begins from the fact that we are trying to achieve an objective understanding of this text according to its own presuppositions and concerns. There is an analogy here in the process of gaining an objective understanding of another person whom we love. Because of our commitment to them as a person, we want to know them in reality, and not just make them some sort of projection of our own interests. We commit ourselves to understanding them in their distinctiveness, even where we may find them difficult or objectionable. Often we find that when we do that, what seemed objectionable becomes, if not likable, at least understandable. We may then be able to learn from who they are—which does not happen either if we reject them, or if we assimilate them too quickly to what we understand and accept. The significance of modern biblical criticism lies here. It declined to be bound by traditions concerning the meaning of texts and insisted on seeking to discover their inherent meaning. Exegesis focuses on the meaning of texts as acts of communication, and in the process of interpretation, one sets aside the significance of the text for the interpreter, in order to do justice to its inherent meaning. This reflects an ethical principle: recognizing that someone wished to communicate something here, and we respectfully seek to understand what that communication was.

There is also another move in interpretation, another way of understanding what is taking place. There was some reason for our interest in this text (or this person): something drew our attention to it, and persuaded us that it was worth the effort to understand. Moreover, that sense of being drawn in is the way into understanding the text (or the person). The subjective becomes the way into the objective. It turns out to be both an unavoidable

hindrance to interpretation, but also its indispensable help. The challenge to interpretation is to maximize this help and limit the hindrance.

One aid to our reading of the Bible is the recognition that it has been given to the whole Church and not merely to individuals. When we read the Bible we read it with other eyes, and not just our own. If we are fortunate, we read it in a congregation with a mix of genders, ages, classes, and ethnicities. But we also read it in the company (which we intentionally bring in) of other eras (such as the fathers or the reformers); of other faith communities (such as Judaism); and of other cultures and contexts (such as liberation theology from South America, and enculturation theology from Asia or Africa). These have the potential to enable us to see things we would not otherwise see, and to recognize previous misperceptions.

The insights of recent feminist interpretation illustrate these dynamics. The pre-modern interpreters (and with some significant overlap into the twentieth century) read Genesis 1 and 2 in light of the patriarchal realities of their own cultures. The creation of Eve as a “help meet” for Adam does not in itself imply subordination to Adam, but that is how the passage came to be read, uncritically we may say, and we have benefited from feminist critics pointing out such hidden cultural assumptions.

Can the challenge of taking a fresh look at our assumptions also be applied to the issue of same-sex relationships? There is, for example, the long association of “sodomy” and homosexuality with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19: 4-11); but it may well be that the point of the story is to illustrate the violence and wickedness of the city in general, and not to highlight a lurid view of homosexual relationships.<sup>15</sup>

Advocates of same-sex relationships sometimes point to the relationships of Naomi and Ruth, and of David and Jonathan, as possible biblical examples of consensual sexual relationships between members of the same sex. Here there is the obvious difficulty of arguing from an agenda rather than from explicit textual support. But it also exposes the weakness of modern western culture in not being able to foster or even understand deeply committed same-sex friendships that do not involve physical sexual expression.

Liberals often follow the lead of feminists in pointing to the social and religious assumptions built into biblical law. Feminists critique the patriarchal attitudes in Scripture where laws dealing with sexual behavior often have different standards for men and women, and express a pattern of treating women as property rather than as full persons. Similarly, some scholars have argued that the Levitical condemnation of homosexual acts has more to do with purity laws (such as the rules governing dead bodies), or with idolatry (where sleeping with male prostitutes was connected with pagan worship).<sup>16</sup> The conclusion is drawn for us that the force of the prohibitions of same-sex

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<sup>15</sup> Conservatives have different opinions in interpreting this Genesis passage. Robert Gagnon in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 71-91, defends the traditional interpretation, while Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 381, writes that “there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse.”

<sup>16</sup> See William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

relationships in the Old Testament comes from the concern for ritual purity in a Jewish legal context, and therefore that they are not binding after Christ's coming and thus do not have the force of universal moral prohibitions.

This "tour de force" style of exegesis has been used by liberals to limit the scope and relevance of all the biblical passages dealing with same-sex relationships. If the prohibitions in the Mosaic Law can be disregarded as simply on the same level as dietary and other ceremonial laws, the New Testament passages can be severely curtailed by other means. In the few passages where male homosexuals are mentioned (e.g. 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10), it can be argued that the context in Hellenistic culture was one of adolescent youths offering their thighs to adult men, and that the real concern was with pederasty and exploitative sex. The clearest and strongest passage, Romans 1:26-27, has been cleverly dealt with by limiting its reference only to those individuals, whether heterosexual or homosexual, who act against their natural instincts and (perversely) engage in erotic activity with those to whom they are not naturally attracted to. In other words, homosexuals who have an inherent same-sex orientation, it is argued, are not in view in this passage, because they act in accordance with nature.

Taking the passages individually, there is some plausibility in the critical reinterpretation (except, we would say, in the case of Romans 1 where the liberal case is specious). A coherent understanding emerges from setting these passages in interrelationship, not least because sometimes they are alluding to one another. Further, setting these various passages in the context of a broader theological framework has the effect of reinforcing the traditional interpretation of the texts. Specifically, Scripture sets proper sexual expression within the context of God's designing a lifelong exclusive heterosexual relationship as the context for bringing up children.

A full-blown "post-modern" approach, which has been a contemporary reaction against the misplaced confidence of the modern historical critic to be able to grasp the true meaning of a text, tends to give up on the very idea of getting to know the real meaning of a text. This, however, is to throw out the baby with the bath water. There is a certain ethical obligation involved in interpretation: we owe it to the author to try to understand what he or she meant; we also owe it to our forebears in the faith communities who took these writings into their Scriptures and invited us to live by them; and we also owe it to ourselves and to the consistency principle. If there is no such thing as the meaning of the Sodom and Gomorrah story (which is a very different thing from saying that we may have been mistaken in understanding it), then there can be no objection to its being understood as a critique of all same-sex relationships and thus used as a kind of club with which to beat people in same-sex relationships. The fact that sometimes we may be uncertain what Isaiah or Paul was seeking to communicate is no reason for abandoning any attempt to understand what they wrote. Our culture, time and place does enter into the process of interpretation; but that does not prevent us from trying to understand a text (and a person) different from us, one that needs understanding on its own terms.

### *Using the Bible as a Whole*

An important aspect of tradition is that the form of the Scriptures has been determined

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and handed down by the Church as the Word of God. It is not so much that the church councils *decided* or *conferred* authority on certain gospel narratives and epistles of Paul, etc., but that the Church has *recognized* the special authority characteristic that these texts inherently have.

We discern the wisdom (and the guidance of the Holy Spirit) in the pluriformity of the narratives, even where there are overlapping accounts, differing accounts, and slight differences in the presentation and diversity of emphasis. Deuteronomy, for instance, covers some of the same material of the law and covenant as earlier sections of the Torah, but with a different context and purpose. In the New Testament, the four Gospels have much material in common, but also different themes and emphases, as well as individual unique material.

To minimize the problems of proof-texting and to secure the most faithful interpretation, we must be attentive to the witness of the whole of Scripture: not merely assembling the full range of relevant texts on a topic, but treating them in a way that is consistent with what we know of the basic theological themes and principles, and especially in accordance with the teaching and witness of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God.

### *Jesus and the Torah*

In Matthew 5, Jesus makes a series of declarations beginning “You have heard...but I say to you...” These declarations take up statements in the Torah and comment on the way it was or might be interpreted, or on how its requirements need to be taken further. In criticizing anger as well as murder, lust as well as adultery, Jesus does not tell his disciples that they may now ignore the commandments, but refers to attitudes that may motivate behavior. Matthew 5:43 is more puzzling, as there is, of course, no requirement, in the Torah that people should hate their enemies.

There is some irony about the fact that these declarations in Matthew 5 appear in a chapter that contains strong statements about the abiding significance of the Torah. Jesus declares that he has come not to annul the Torah and the Prophets but to bring them to fulfillment; people who attempt to revoke any of them or teach other people to do so have a very low place in the kingdom of heaven, while those who observe and teach them have a high place (Matt 5:17-19). This fits with other aspects of the way Jesus refers to the Torah, such as his repeated affirmations “It stands written” during his testing in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Jesus takes the same attitude to the Jewish Scriptures as any other Jew.

How does “fulfillment” of the Torah come about through those pronouncements that involve declaring, “You have heard. . . but I say to you”? In some instances, this fulfillment comes about through the interpretation of an individual requirement of the Torah. Leviticus itself makes clear that the requirement to love one’s neighbor implies loving one’s enemy. If the average Israelite has enemies, they will also be neighbors, that is, people in the village: those who steal or harm one’s animals, or accuse one of wrongdoing, or seduce one’s daughters—these are the ones who will be one’s enemies. Thus, in Leviticus 19:18 the command about loving one’s neighbor follows an exhortation about not taking redress or bearing grudges against people, and it suggests the principle involved in these acts of self-denial. Taken in isolation, loving one’s neighbor

could mean that one was free to dismiss or attack one's enemy; but Jesus makes explicit what is implicit in the Torah by declaring that it implies having concern for and a forgiving attitude towards one's enemies in the community. He thus fulfills or "fills out" the Torah.

In some of his comments on Torah passages, Jesus declares that the requirements of the Law are more demanding than conventional interpretation suggests. For example, in Mark 10:2-8 when some Pharisees want to know his attitude to divorce, he asks them what the Torah says. They refer to Deuteronomy 24, which requires a man to provide a woman with papers to indicate her status if he divorces her. Jesus responds by declaring, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this command for you. Yet, from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'" When the disciples ask him further about the matter, he declares that anyone who divorces their spouse (unless it is because of *porneia*, Matt 19:9 adds) and marries another commits adultery.<sup>17</sup> Jesus thus sets verses from Genesis 1 and 2 alongside the verses from Deuteronomy, draws attention to the clash between them, provides a principle for understanding the clash, and suggests how a disciple should behave in this connection (though in Matthew 19 he recognizes that not everyone will be able to live with his teaching on the question).

Jesus thus suggests a basis for interpreting Scripture: we are to evaluate scriptural perspectives according to the way they reflect God's vision in creation, along with the possible provision for human hardness of heart. It is possible to see the same critical principle implicit in his exhortations concerning anger, lust, lying, and revenge. A ban on murder, adultery, false oaths, and excessive retribution do not go far enough, because they fall short of the standards implicit in God's creation. Indeed, one might then see Jesus' entire teaching as expounding what it means to be a real human being who lives according to the vision of the Creator, as he makes explicit in his distorted comment reported by the evangelist on loving enemies (Matt 5:45). The Torah does not begin with the concrete commands in Exodus to Deuteronomy that make allowance for human willfulness. It begins with the vision in Genesis 1-2, and Jesus fulfills the Torah partly by reaffirming its vision, indicating its implications, and challenging his disciples to live by this vision. As other prophets do, Jesus clarifies the evangelists' interpretation of the implications of the Torah.

According to the evangelists, Jesus' interpretive principle comes from inside the Torah, to reflect its inner meaning and purpose. The comments of Jesus on aspects of the Torah that make allowance for human hardness of heart do not imply that he is de-canonizing or relativizing sections of the Law. Indeed, that aspect of his evaluation reflects an emphasis in Deuteronomy on the reality of human stubbornness, as the four evangelists saw it.

Regarding our issue of same-sex relationships, the question might arise whether in our present context Jesus might say either "You have heard.... but I say to you," or, "Moses because of your hardness of hearts," and if so, what he would mean by these statements. Is same-sex attraction a divine gift from creation parallel to heterosexual attraction, or is it one manifestation of the way we have all been affected negatively by the world's

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<sup>17</sup> See also Matthew 5:32.

sinfulness? In isolation, the restrictive regulations in Leviticus and the negative comments in the epistles about same-sex acts might be read either way.

Might same-sex relationships go back to God's creation intent and have the same theological and ethical status as heterosexual relationships? This would fit with the fact that such relationships seem as "natural" to some people as heterosexual relationships seem to other people, yet it can hardly be reckoned to fit with the Torah's own vision of creation and of what is "natural" in the way that is the case with a forswearing of anger, lust, swearing oaths, and forgoing revenge. Jesus points out that the opening chapters of the Torah describe God making humanity male and female and describe a man leaving his parents to be joined to a woman. It is hard to see how this could fit with the idea that a same-sex marriage is just as valid a creation reality as a heterosexual marriage.

The argument is often made that the scriptural treatment of chattel slavery, the subordination of women, and the prohibition of usury are moral issues where subsequent reflection and experience led to genuine change in the Church's teaching, and that the question of same-sex relationships poses the same kind of challenge to accept the wisdom of a new perspective. However, this comparison really does not work. With regard to the subordination of women, it is explicit in Genesis 3 that men's ruling over women came about as result of human disobedience rather than as an original intention of creation. Texts that require the subordination of women can therefore plausibly be seen as concessions to human sinfulness, and reflect the disorder of humanity after the fall.

The same description in Genesis 1:27 of humanity made in God's image in turn leads to a description of humanity's vocation to cultivate and tend the garden; there is no hint of slavery or servitude in human relationships. Texts in the Torah that later regularize servitude are concerned to constrain an institution that exists because of the fallenness of humankind. The New Testament has been seen as more acquiescent to slavery, but there are texts (e.g. 1 Tim 1:10) that put human trafficking in a negative light. We should regard the apparent acquiescence (not at all the same as approval, by the way!) as largely a reflection of the immense power and apparent resistance to change of the political and legal institutions of the Roman empire within which the Church had to manage.

There are no indications in Scripture parallel to the principles used against slavery, racism and the subordination of women to which we could appeal to demonstrate that God's creation ideal should also embrace same-sex relationships. Rather, the portrayal of human origins in Genesis points in the opposite direction. There, the centerpiece in the vision of human marriage is not intimacy or relationship or romance but family. The man and the woman will be the means and the context in which the family will grow in such a way as to serve God and serve the land. This point in itself does not exclude same-sex marriages, but it does suggest they are not an equally valid option.

If the Church—or at least a large portion of it in western countries—does actually move ahead on the question of accepting same-sex relationships, it may appear to be following a pattern of moral change demonstrated in the past. In our judgment, however, the reasoning behind this change in viewing marriage and sexual relations will have come more from assimilation to modern culture than from following Jesus in learning how better to understand and live by the Scriptures.

### *Canonical Interpretation*

Another way to describe critical interpretation is to think in terms of a canon within the canon. Though this is an ambiguous notion, there are several ways in which it may function. It can (for instance) designate those parts of Scripture that a particular group takes with ultimate seriousness, a kind of practical canon within the formal canon. Such an informal and possibly unconscious recognition of a canon within the canon can be a way to understand Scripture, but needs to be open to revision. Second, the canon within the canon can denote the material within the canon that one views as actually true and binding, over against material that reflects human misconceptions and to which we are not bound. Third, the canon within the canon can denote the material that expresses the most central or clearest insights, which provide clues to understanding other material without implying that this other material is less binding. Canonical interpretation then reminds itself that the canon itself still is the actual canon. The greater attention paid to interpreting portions of the Bible in the light of the themes and concerns of the rest of the canon of Scripture has been spurred on in part by the work of such biblical scholars as Brevard Childs.<sup>18</sup> Our concern is to take the whole of Scripture seriously. How do we do this in connection with same-sex relationships?

The attempt to discover what the Bible has to say about same-sex relationships involves looking to it for answers to questions it does not pose, at least not in the form we want to ask them. The notion of same-sex marriage did not exist in Scripture or in its contemporary contexts. To the church, the idea of the Scriptures being the canon implied that they offer enlightenment on issues other than ones they directly discuss. The discussions of various issues from within Scripture suggest frameworks and paradigms for considering other issues.

The first chapters of Genesis were not written to provide a description of the - mechanics of the process whereby the world came into existence. It is a misuse of Scripture to force it into a scientific framework foreign to its outlook. On the other hand, we realize that “in Main Street America, evolution is often interpreted as a creation story for atheists,”<sup>19</sup> i.e., many people who believe in the theory of evolution do so because they believe that by its nature it excludes any need for God (of course, many other people recognize that by its own nature it does not do so). In that context, it is quite appropriate to read Genesis 1 in a way that emphasizes what it says about the process whereby the world came into existence, such as the fact that God was involved, that it was systematic and organized, that it issued in a good world. It is not inappropriate to put some emphasis on aspects of Genesis 1 that say something in response to our questions as well as to those of people such as Judeans living in Babylon in the sixth century.

The practice of tithing and the observance of the Sabbath provide examples of the ongoing process of interpretation of Scripture within the community. Through the Old

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<sup>18</sup> See B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). See also Richard Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, who stresses the importance of looking at the whole canonical witness of the Bible in using it to address moral issues.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Giberson and Donald Yerxa, *Species of Origins* (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 2002), 58.



Testament and at least into the Gospels, there is never any question that these observances are expected of the people, but what they mean changes. Thus, tithing in Genesis 14 starts as a recognition of achievement and as such a common Middle-Eastern practice, and a natural human instinct. In Jacob's story (Gen 28:22), tithing becomes a response to God's promise, though perhaps one conveying some irony as it is a way of appearing generous. In Leviticus 27:30-33, it expresses an acknowledgment of God's giving; people cannot claim credit for tithing and need to beware of evading its demand. In Numbers 18:21-32, it is a means of supporting the ministry. In Deuteronomy 14:22-29, it also benefits the needy. In 1 Samuel 8:15-17, Samuel warns of how tithes will be claimed by the king, suggesting more irony; demanding tithes is a means of oppression. In Amos 4:4, tithing is accompanied by self-indulgence, suggesting yet more irony; tithing a means of evading real commitment (cf. Matt 23:23). In Malachi 3:8-12, it becomes an index of whether people are really committed to God and therefore the decisive factor in whether they experience God's blessing. It is no surprise that in many churches, it can seem to be the pastor's favorite text. Yet this means tithing is in danger of being merely a means of our paying for services rendered and for our church buildings to be kept ambient.

Instead, we might ask a different sort of question. In light of the way God inspired the community to see so many different meanings in tithing within Scripture, perhaps western Christians might tithe for the provision of nourishment, education, basic health care in the poor sections of the world, and expect that perhaps to issue in God blessing us. This would radically confront (and perhaps imperil) the financial foundations of standard North American church life.

In a parallel way, the Old Testament always assumes Israel must observe the Sabbath, but the significance of doing so keeps changing. In Exodus 20:8-11 it reflects the pattern of God's work as creator. In Deuteronomy 5:12-15 it reflects the pattern of God's deliverance of serfs from Egypt. In Amos 8:4-7 it confronts the desire of merchants to make money. In Isaiah 56:1-8, it provides people such as eunuchs and foreigners with an identity marker for commitment to the God of Israel. In the modern West, we could see the Sabbath in tension with a mentality shaped by consumerism, efficiency, and constant activity, thus constituting a radical confrontation with the foundations of the culture.<sup>20</sup>

Seeing the significance of Scripture for our world combines a kind of left-brain process and a right-brain process: one is linear and exegetical, undertaken as an attempted exercise in objective study, while the other is imaginative and intuitive, undertaken in light of current issues and experience. The two of course complement each other. Investigating the significance of tithing or the Sabbath within Scripture, utilizing critical and exegetical methods, is a predominantly left-brain process. Making a leap from what is going on in the ancient text to insight for our own world is more a right-brain process that more obviously involves the Holy Spirit's inspiration if it is to generate genuine insight. Testing the alleged insight involves a further left-brain process utilizing critical and exegetical methods, analogous to the process for testing prophecy (of which, indeed,

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<sup>20</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 90-99.

this is an example). One would have to ask whether the kind of giving for the sake of the poor in the third world as suggested above, with its possible consequence in the neglecting of church buildings and facilities in the west, fits with the teaching of Scripture as a whole. One would likewise have to ask whether encouraging people to work less fits with the teaching of Scripture as a whole.

Can we then find a plausible canonical reading of the Scriptures in which a positive view of same-sex relationships has a place? We think this is highly dubious, and the next section below provides a summary analysis of the texts to demonstrate this. To speak of interpreting Scripture canonically involves some redundancy. By definition, Scripture is a canon, and the church's canon is Scripture. It is its key resource and final norm. The question seems to be whether our church is able to let Scripture function in that fashion in dealing with the issue of same-sex marriage, or whether the issue will be determined more by cultural and political pressures.

### **Summary of Biblical Teaching on Same Sex Relationships**

There is force and clarity from the texts of Scripture that we set out together. First, there are important texts that underscore the basis of marriage as between a man and a woman; second, the texts that forbid same-sex relationships should be read in this context.

#### *Marriage Texts*

In Genesis, we have familiar texts summarizing the place of man and woman in God's creation plan. Genesis 1:27 (NRSV): "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

There is in the text an obvious emphasis on the connection of all humanity to the image of God. The fact that God created humanity as male and female stresses that both genders constitute humanity, and share in the reflection of the image. This much can be confidently stated. It is a more controversial and perhaps tenuous argument to attempt to link the definition of the image of God directly to the male-female relationship in the way that Karl Barth did when he identified the complementary relation between man and woman as constituting the *imago Dei*.<sup>21</sup>

It is fair to conclude from the context that the mention of male and female has to do with the fulfillment of God's purpose in creation. There is a link to dominion in v. 26 and then to the fruitfulness of humankind emphasized in v. 28—the blessing of humanity and its proliferation is implied in the creation of male and female. Anglican biblical scholar Gordon Wenham has commented: "Here then we have a clear statement of the divine purpose of marriage: positively, it is for the procreation of children; negatively, it is a rejection of the ancient oriental fertility cults."<sup>22</sup>

The text from Genesis 2:24 is explicitly about marriage: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." The phrase

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<sup>21</sup> Barth was trying to stress that the individual human being does not *possess* the *imago Dei* as the quality of rationality, and so on, but as a person-in-community. See *Church Dogmatics* III. 1, 183-206.

<sup>22</sup> G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 33.

“clings to” or “cleaves to” suggests that marriage should be characterized by both passion and permanence.<sup>23</sup> Man and woman becoming “one flesh,” has a multi-faceted implication: the physical sexual union itself, the children conceived in marriage, the spiritual and emotional relationship that it involves, as well as the new set of kinship relations established by the marriage—all are indicated by the resultant “one flesh.” This perspective on the one-flesh aspect of marriage is the basis for the subsequent provisions in the Mosaic Law for kinship and remarriage.<sup>24</sup>

In the New Testament, we have in Mark 10:1-9 (and parallel in Matt 19) a reaffirmation of the principles of marriage according to God’s will, as Jesus’ citation from Genesis includes both Gen 1:27 and 2:24. This is an important reaffirmation of the continuing basis for marriage under the new covenant.

The concern in the teaching of Jesus is centered on divorce, and we must take seriously (especially in the Markan version where there is no exception clause as found in Matthew) that divorce ought not to take place. “The marriage ethics of the kingdom of God must be based not on a concession to human failure, but on the only pattern set out in God’s original creation of man and woman.”<sup>25</sup>

Although in concise format, we have some clear characteristics of marriage delineated in these verses from Genesis and Mark:

- Between male and female
- Connected to children and fruitfulness
- Passion and commitment (emotional and institutional weight)
- To be considered permanent

How are we to consider same-sex relationships in the light of these creation principles? From a strictly logical point of view, describing God’s intention as a man and a woman leaving their parents and cleaving to each other does not necessarily prevent a same-sex pair from fulfilling the last two characteristics here, namely passionate attachment and permanent commitment. The connection of marriage, in God’s plan, to the fruitfulness of humanity through the creation of children and families, however, would imply an important lack of an essential characteristic.

### *Texts Forbidding Same-Sex Relations*

There are only a few texts, but in the words of Richard Hays, these “are unambiguously and unremittingly negative in their judgment.”<sup>26</sup>

1 Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The act of a man lying with another man “as with a woman” is categorically prohibited—note that the act in general is proscribed, and that it is not relevant to consider the motivations for the act (exploitation, prostitution, and so on).

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 71.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 388.

<sup>26</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 381.

Arguments that this is a purity law (where the concern is ritual purity rather than a fundamental moral principle), or that many aspects of the Old Testament are irrelevant in the new covenant after Jesus are considerably undercut by Jesus' own affirmation of Genesis 1:27 and 2.24 in Mark 10.

2. Romans 1:18-32. Here Paul is reflecting on the purpose of creation, and the tendency of human beings to turn toward creating their own objects of worship. Humanity's unrighteousness consists fundamentally in a refusal to honor God and render him thanks. The human race has neglected the evidence of God and turned to idolatry.<sup>27</sup>

For Paul, one dramatic example of this reversal is the love of male for male and female for female. The reference to God as creator (v. 26) would automatically invoke in readers the creation account, especially Genesis 1:27 that links creation of humanity in the image of God with their creation as male and female.

We may observe the following: (1) Paul's overarching purpose in the early chapters of Romans is to argue for the universality of sin. The point is not to isolate homosexual practice as a special type of sin. (2) Also, Paul points specifically to the form of the homosexual relationship, its inversion of the created order, as a sign of this larger condition of fallen humanity. In so doing, he refers to lesbian couples as well to male homosexuality. This point effectively answers the liberal argument (see above) that the condemnation of homosexual relationships in the New Testament is really about pederasty or abuse of power in unequal relationships, because the context will not support such a narrowing of Paul's concern.

The Pauline phrase "God gave them up" occurs three times, indicating that the condition fallen human beings find themselves in is a natural consequence of turning from God. Contrary to the impression many have of God sending further punishment on those who disobey, the picture here in Romans is that sexual perversion itself is a kind of punishment for abandoning the ways of the true God,<sup>28</sup> rather than a specific punishment for the perversion. Thus idolatry, the major theme of the passage, finally debases both the worshiper and the idol. The creature's impulse toward self-glorification ends in self-destruction. "The refusal to acknowledge God as creator ends in blind distortion of the creation."<sup>29</sup>

3. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10. In these passages, those who practice homosexual behavior are included in lists of the kind of persons who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Both passages use the term *arsenokoitai*, a term not found prior to its appearance in 1 Corinthians 6, but seems to refer generically to men who lie with other men as with a woman, thus echoing the condemnation of Leviticus.

In addition to *arsenokoitai*, Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9: refers to *malakoi*, which was a common slang term in Hellenistic Greek for the passive partner in gay sexual relationships. The use of both terms here is another rebuttal to the liberal argument that the chief concern in these passages concerned pederasty, a point that would be more

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<sup>27</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 384.

<sup>28</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 126-7.

<sup>29</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 385.

convincing if the consistent term were *malakoi*. To discern the larger point being made in these passages is the point. The one-flesh pattern of heterosexual marriage in Genesis was the background for the descriptions of sinful behavior in the letters to Timothy, to the Corinthians and to the Romans. Because homosexual behavior was more common in the Greco-Roman world, there was a need to update and expand the list of actions contrary to the Decalogue by including homosexual behavior along with theft, adultery, and so on.

In 1 Corinthians, we have the context of the kingdom of God. Those who habitually are adulterers, idolaters, thieves, drunkards, and greedy in character, are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. Thus, we see not just a catalog of current vices, but a theological chain linking the will of God in creation, to the qualities of character expected in the coming kingdom, clarified by reference to the Decalogue.<sup>30</sup>

### Scripture and the Larger Picture

A number of the arguments in favor of the blessing of same-sex unions acknowledge the reality of sin and the promise of resurrection life, but rely upon a stark contrast between the old eon and the new in which Christians live. Some liberals appeal to Acts 15 and the council of Jerusalem, for example, arguing that the situation of contemporary Christians is held to be analogous to that of Peter, who has a revelation of the new salvation-historical moment that makes it possible to move past outmoded norms. Similarly, appeals are sometimes made to Paul's claim that we in Christ have transcended the differences between "male and female" (Gal 3:28), and this fundamentally changes rules governing sexual relations. Or, consider the much later argument that many of the Torah's requirements may be summed up as temporary ceremonial laws which Christ has come to abolish (here making the Levitical prohibition of same-sex relations analogous to the regulations about impurity is a standard strategy).<sup>31</sup> Christians ought to understand the resurrection to be the renewal of the created order, but that this created order retains its meaning and form; it is, after all a created *order*. What has been done away with is the futility of sin, our inability to restore our damaged relationship with God. Now this continuity of the created order includes human nature as it was created by God, and so also the divine intention of the union of male and female in one flesh which entails the social, psychological and physical union, including the fruitfulness of childbearing as part of the order of creation. The citation by Jesus in Mark 10 (and parallels) of this passage from Genesis is highly significant in reaffirming the perpetual continuity of this principle of creation.

Living in the hope of the resurrection of the body reminds us that God is restoring creation, not abolishing the old, and replacing it with something very different. The world

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<sup>30</sup> David Field, "Homosexuality," in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1994), 451-452.

<sup>31</sup> So William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

that God is and will be renewing retains its intended shape.<sup>32</sup> Now in the “in-between” time in which we live, this process is incomplete, and we still need the guidance and the reproof of the Law, for we still struggle to live into the new world God has granted to us (so Romans 6). Christians are not saved by the law, but by God’s grace; yet the Christian life is not antinomian, because the law has an instructive and illuminative function.

It follows then that when we think about marriage and family we need to think about God’s work in creation and His work in redemption as aspects of a single gracious intention for us. As St. Irenaeus struggled against the Gnostics, we hold creation and redemption closely together. This is no less true when we think about the gift of marriage within the new dispensation of grace. Here the key passage is of course Ephesians 5:31-32: “For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.” Here Ephesians<sup>33</sup> gives us a new and spiritual meaning for marriage, for it is to be a living symbol of the love that Christ has for His Church. The fact that Paul obviously refers to the familiar Genesis text as Jesus did is important in signifying that the expanded spiritual meaning and signification of marriage is firmly rooted, and grows from, the inherited “one-flesh” physical-spiritual reality of creation. Male and female are not transcended; the mystical signification of marriage cannot support Gnostic dualism, or utopian reorganizations of sexuality and family life, or the current desire for same-sex marriages: husband and wife (plus progeny) is the pattern for sexuality to be discerned as God’s revealed will.

### Part 3

#### Discerning the Sexual Patterns in Creation:

##### *The Theological Use of Science and Natural Law*

In the marriage rite in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, we find in the opening address of the priest to the man and woman to be married, reference to God’s establishment of marriage in creation, Jesus’ presence at the wedding in Cana, and the mystical signification of the relationship between Christ and the Church. The meaning of marriage pointed to by the rite combines the union of husband and wife on all levels: social and relational, psychological and spiritual, and physical and biological. Reference to the procreation and nurture of children is integral and essential to the biblical meaning of the union in one flesh of husband and wife.<sup>34</sup>

The proposal to adopt same-sex marriage is not simply a matter of drawing the circle of eligibility a little wider to include those who are attracted to members of their own gender

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<sup>32</sup> Oliver O’Donovan has been eloquent on this theme in many of his works, including especially *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, second ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> We are aware that there is some scholarly doubt about Paul’s authorship of Ephesians, but prefer to take the well-supported traditional position.

<sup>34</sup> The inclusion of the phrase “when it is God’s will” (BCP, 423), is an ambiguous modification of the declaration of God’s intention: it may *properly* be taken to refer to the contingency of age or physical condition of any particular couple; but it would be *improper* to take the phrase as implying that the procreation of children is something extraneous to or optional in God’s intentions for marriage in general.

rather than the traditional male and female pairs. It is to change the nature and meaning of marriage in a fundamental way. More precisely, it is to drop essential aspects of the biblically depicted meaning of male and female marriage, untie the strands of purposes given to us by the Creator, and hold on only to those threads that we find convenient or appealing.

We realize that the methods of contraception and reproduction now available have obscured awareness of the meaning and purposes of sexuality and marriage as described by Christian theology. This is of course merely symptomatic of a much wider shift in western thought from a discernment of meaning and purpose in nature, to an attitude that nature—including our own human nature—is something on which we are free to impose our own will and purposes. This attitude of technological control over a nature that is neutral or meaningless until we impose values and goals on it is deeply embedded in the modern western mentality. That mentality has generated both obviously impressive achievements in areas such as medicine, engineering, and agriculture, as well as greater powers of damage to our humanity and the environment.

When we apply the technological mentality to sexual relations, we get the common modern attitude that there are biological functions, with physiological, psychological, and social aspects, and we as agents decide, based on our own values, what we want to get out of sex and sexual relationships. As Christians, however, we need to think what it means to find in sex and marriage a participation in a creation provided and intended by God for us. That we as creatures have no power to change the purposes inherent in the created order, and to suppose we can devise and impose our own desires and purposes is a kind of Promethean self-deception.

What we offer in two sections that follow is a summary of what can be discerned, for theological and moral purposes, from what we may call the realities of sexual patterns in creation. Because sexuality itself is so multi-faceted, we deal in the first section much more specifically with what is at the crux of our discussion about same-sex marriage: the state of scientific knowledge about homosexuality and same-sex attraction. We aim to show that the certainty common in modern western society, fostered by the media and the educational establishment, about the origins and nature of homosexuality does not reflect the ambiguity characteristic of the studies of specialists in the field.

In the larger section that follows, we deal with homosexuality from the perspective of natural law. This approach is of course philosophical rather than “scientific” in the modern sense, but is also based on reason in that it seeks to discern patterns from the created order in philosophical and theological reflection. The concept of “natural law” is easily misunderstood, and we take some care to avoid misconceptions and exaggerated claims.

### *Homosexuality and Science*

In the general public and in mainline church circles the support of the homosexual agenda is based on the key assumptions that same-sex attraction is *common* and *innate*. An important part of the conservative reluctance to accede to this pressure and momentum towards approving same sex marriage is the conviction that the actual evidence to back up a shift in policy is far weaker than many people realize. The prevalence of

homosexuality, for example, is often exaggerated to a range close to 10% when 2% would be much more accurate.<sup>35</sup>

Central to the argument for normalizing same-sex relationships within the Episcopal Church and other Christian groups, is the key assumption that homosexual orientation or attraction to members of one's own gender is something fixed and innate. Gays and lesbians often report that from the earliest point of sexual interest and self-awareness they find themselves attracted not to the opposite sex, but to their own, and the conclusion is drawn (by themselves and by others) that the causes must have been present from birth.

The liberal argument then goes on to treat such same-sex attractions as natural, i.e., occurring within the natural order, and thus should be considered part of the category of creation. Both the secular versions of celebrating diversity and "gay pride," as well as the claim of homosexual Christians to be naturally the way they are ("God made me this way") have convinced the general public that a significant part of the population is simply born with a different set of sexual responses and inclinations which we should all accept as natural, normal variations, and for Christians, part of God's creation.

This view of the normality and naturalness of same-sex attraction has rapidly secured wide (and unwarranted) acceptance. As a recent example, it is instructive to consider the recent project of two Roman Catholic moral theologians, Todd Salzman and Michael Lawler, since they are arguing for a liberal view strongly at odds with their Church's official teaching.

Salzman and Lawler provide us with a good example of how people turn the ambiguous state of scientific knowledge about homosexuality into an assumed consensus position to justify their project:

There is growing agreement also in the scientific community that sexual orientation, heterosexual or homosexual, is an innate condition over which the person has no control and that she or he cannot change without psychological damage. In addition, because homosexual orientation is experienced as a given and not as something freely chosen, it cannot be considered unnatural, unreasonable, and therefore immoral, for morality presumes the freedom to choose.<sup>36</sup>

In a few lines, these authors have managed to work in several highly questionable assumptions and assertions. Even when we set aside the logical confusion between orientation, behavior, and morality in the last sentence,<sup>37</sup> we are left with three fallacies

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<sup>35</sup> The 10% figure has been quoted for more than fifty years since the methodologically questionable Kinsey Report. Some of the difference between the higher and lower figures can be attributed to whether one includes or excludes a large group of those who do not report *exclusive* same sex attractions.

<sup>36</sup> Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>37</sup> Traditional Catholic teaching would see the orientation as unnatural, but not immoral, because it is action and behavior that become the subject of morality.



that need correction: (1) that current science points to sexual orientation as basically innate; (2) that the attempt to change orientation is bound to cause harm; and (3) if homosexuality is something “given,” it cannot be considered in the category of “unnatural.” The rest of this section on scientific evidence will counter the first two points, and the section on natural law that follows will clarify what a *theological* notion of “unnatural” implies, and why this still applies.

### *Is Homosexuality Innate?*

For our purposes in this document, we draw on two helpful summaries and overviews of the literature on science and homosexuality—one from 1994 and the other from 2008. Both of these were provided by practitioners in the field, and provided specifically for the benefit of Anglican discussions of homosexuality.<sup>38</sup> Below, (on a separate page) is a chart comparing these two reviews of the scientific literature on the factors influencing homosexuality (abbreviated as HS)

A common perception in the general public (aided by simplistic stories in the press) is that there is probably a genetic cause for homosexuality; and if the “gay gene” has not yet been discovered, research will eventually provide this. The main argument against this, which emerges in the review by David de Pomerai, is the study of identical, or monozygotic, twins. When one twin is homosexual the other twin, since he shares the same genes for height, hair color, etc., ought also to be homosexual (if the genetic theory of origin is to be valid). This is true in less than half of the cases, however, suggesting that genetic influence is of some significance, but not decisive. As Tom Brown summarized, we may accept that there is some genetic basis for homosexuality, but this is not to concede genetic determinism. Parallels suggested by Brown are musical ability and temperamental inclinations toward introversion or extroversion: there is a genetic component, certainly, to temperament and musical talent, but the role of environmental influence and personal psychological processing is also highly important.

In reviewing the various theories to explain homosexual attraction, both studies stress that the evidence does not point to any sort of “gay gene” or one type of biological cause. In fact, it is unlikely to be the case that there is an “innate” causal factor (or set of factors), because the role of environment (psychosocial factors) is also extremely important. The recent de Pomerai overview reminds us to take into account that there are different categories of homosexuals, and that some mechanisms will apply to one category more than another; that there are multiple causes; and that the “relative proportions of these elements in the total mixture” will vary from individual to

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<sup>38</sup> The work of J. Bancroft, “Homosexual Orientation: The Search for a Biological Basis,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 164 (1994), 437-40, summarized by Tom Brown, “A Psychiatrist’s Perspective,” in T. Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 137-144. The more recent survey is David de Pomerai, “Biological Mechanisms in Homosexuality: A Critical Review” in Philip Groves (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality: A Resource to Enable Listening and Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 2008), 268-292.

individual.<sup>39</sup>

The rather agnostic concluding sentences in de Pomerai's review are far indeed from supporting the common general assumption of homosexual orientation as innate: "Only a complex and highly variable mixture of underlying mechanisms—some biological, as well as some psychosocial—seems adequate to explain the reality of HS in human society, and no single mechanism can claim to hold the key to HS. This is the biological reality with which theologians must grapple."<sup>40</sup> Taken in the context of De Pomerai's careful assessment of the recent studies and literature, such a judgment should keep us from making arguments and forming positions based on the assumption that all homosexuals are inherently so from birth.

### *Is Change in Orientation Possible?*

The issue of change is more problematic, both in terms of evaluating the evidence, and in terms of the role of agendas and hidden assumptions that shape the research and conclusions. We should note that the American Psychological Association at their (2009) annual meeting strongly cautioned their members about the methods and claims of sexual orientation treatment programs.

Within the past ten years or so, several studies have been made to calculate the effects, both positive and negative, of the programs designed to help those with unwanted same-sex attractions to change.<sup>41</sup> Care must be taken in evaluating the studies and data, because of the problems of definition, size of samples, the type of counseling and the ambiguities of the program outcomes. Harrison's evaluation does not condemn such counseling ministries, but points out the dangers of crude theories, false and exaggerated claims, and poor interventions by insensitive or poorly trained counselors.

The summary conclusion by Harrison points to (1) the possibility of "significant changes" in patterns of unwanted same-sex attraction, with a conservative estimate in the 10-15% range, and (2) a larger proportion who are able to bring their unwanted same-sex attractions "into line with their values" in the face of a persisting mix of sexual attractions.<sup>42</sup> Harrison rightly reminds us of the very real risk of harm in some cases. This then implies in the accompanying recommendations the need for setting clear and high standards that require informed consent, and appropriate training for counselors in such programs or ministries.

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<sup>39</sup> De Pomerai, 290.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> The main studies have been by Nicolosi et al. (2000), Spitzer (2003), and Jones and Yarhouse (2007) and are reviewed by Glynn Harrison, "Unwanted Same-sex Attractions: Can Pastoral and Counseling Interventions Help People to Change?" in Groves (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, 293-332.

<sup>42</sup> Harrison, "Unwanted Same-sex Attractions," 328.

**Assessments of the Theories of Homosexual Origins in 1994 and 2008**

	Bancroft (1994)	De Pomerai (2008)
<b>Genetics</b>	There is undoubtedly some evidence that genetic factors are of “some significance” in determining sexual orientation, especially in men.	HS is unlikely to be caused by a single variant gene. The situation may be more like multi-gene disorders, where a variant gene or a combination of such may confer susceptibility to the condition, dependent on interaction with environmental factors and other genes.  Evidence from studies of identical twins is relevant here.
<b>Nurture (psychosocial)</b>	There is “a lot of room for environmental influences”	Environmental factors are of undoubted importance
<b>Hormonal Influences</b>	By the early 1990s, theories of hormonal balance <i>in utero</i> were no longer considered relevant	Slight revival of these theories: some suggest that female HS may be linked to high androgen exposure, and male HS to low androgen exposure. The evidence is “weak and confusing.”
<b>Fraternal Birth Order</b>	Not considered	There is an increase in the prevalence of HS among younger brothers (no similar effect for female HS). This might be related to the mother becoming progressively immunized against male-specific proteins.

## Creation, Natural Law, and Modern Culture

So far, we have been proceeding in our argument about the shape of creation, even in this era after the resurrection, by referring to Scripture and thinking about the implications of those words for our Christian lives. But this biblical-theological argument is bolstered by an appeal of a more philosophical sort, what the tradition has called “natural law.”

The theory of natural law, developed in classical philosophy and in patristic and scholastic theology, attempts to account for the awareness of certain general moral principles that human beings have, apart from specifically religious teachings. Human beings have a rational nature, which in the social and moral spheres implies the ability to have purposes and reasons for our actions. This allows us to discern meanings and purposes in the structure of the world we live in, and to draw moral conclusions from reflecting on the nature of human life.<sup>43</sup>

For Christian theology, the claim of natural law is both weakened and strengthened by scriptural revelation. On one hand, the Bible informs us of the reality of sin and the fall that weaken the confidence that can be placed in the ability of human reason to discern reality accurately and to draw proper moral conclusions. Yet, we note that Paul makes the argument in Romans 2:12-18 that gentiles without the Mosaic Law are still accountable based on some moral knowledge they ought to have.

Yet, on the other hand, natural law is strengthened in that the Christian can speak more confidently about this kind of guidance through natural law because of the knowledge that the reality of the world we are part of has been provided for us with certain purposes and guidelines. Certain meanings and purposes in creation can be discerned from careful reflection on our experience of life and living in the world, because they are expressive of God’s care and wisdom in creation, and allow us to speak about the guidance offered by this kind of reflection as a kind of moral authority.<sup>44</sup> Some of these purposes God instructs us about through scriptural revelation, and some are left for us to discern through reflection and reason. The Reformed Protestant tradition distinguished between “special” and “general” revelation to indicate the difference between knowledge through Scripture and knowledge through natural law, and that God as creator is the ultimate source of all truth. The love and wisdom of God lie behind the created order in which we live and allow us as Christians to have more confidence, especially with Scripture, to affirm meaning and purpose in the world. Yet even without a Jewish or Christian perspective, there is order and meaning to be perceived. Oliver O’Donovan, in a recent treatment dealing specifically with our thinking about homosexuality, wrote:

Any purposes God has in making the world are to be discerned in the world; they

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<sup>43</sup> For definitions, see A. H. Holmes, “Natural Law,” in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 619-621, and Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), esp. 63-64.

<sup>44</sup> We have referred above to Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*. See also the discussion of authority and its connection to reality, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

are not set apart from it somewhere else. Any discernment of how the world works will. . . be a discernment of the purposes of God. No “presupposition” is required for this discernment other than that it is a *morally intelligible* world, a world in which there is good and evil to be distinguished, a world fit for humans to act in.<sup>45</sup>

The moral dimensions of life in this world are thus something that can be discerned by human beings in general. Christians have the important advantage of being able to reflect on this moral reality in the light of God’s revelation in Scripture. We as human beings are able to reason about the nature of human society and government, the meaning and purpose of punishment, the nature of health and medicine, the education of children, the principles of economics, and the relations between nations, to take some examples. The theories and approaches that are developed have sometimes been wrongheaded, of course, and need to be guided, ultimately, by a solid link with the reality and truth of human nature and society.

For Christian thought, there is a mutual corroboration between Scripture, which can be seen as special revelation, and insights from the natural moral order. Where there is an overlap between the insights from the structure of human reality and positive scriptural revelation—for example in the portions of the Decalogue that deal with murder, adultery, lying and stealing—then the rationale of biblical law can be seen to be one of making the conclusions of reason clear and certain.<sup>46</sup> From this perspective, the Christian defender of the traditional view of the family has a measure of confidence in the clarity and certainty of the principle that marriage is between a man and a woman not only because this has seemed self-evident to virtually every human society, but also because it is a principle clearly articulated by the creation narrative in Genesis and reinforced in the teaching of Jesus (Mark 10:6-9 and parallels) and in other parts of Scripture.

There is confusion and skepticism surrounding the natural law line of argument in contemporary thought, which is one reason the liberal case seems to carry such force in our time. One basis for confusion is the belief that conservative proponents of natural law are asserting that principles of natural law are inherent in human consciousness (perhaps from birth), and that modern anthropology, multi-cultural awareness, and post-modern suspicion of universal moral claims has invalidated this kind of appeal to natural law. But the traditional teaching of natural law (as in Aquinas) is not based on inherent common human knowledge, but on the *accessibility* of moral principles to human reflection.<sup>47</sup> The preference of Oliver O’Donovan for speaking of “objective moral order” rather than “natural law” reflects the problems associated with the concept expressed in traditional terminology, including the exaggerated claims for natural law made in the recent past,

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<sup>45</sup> See the important chapter “Creation, Redemption, and Nature” in O. O’Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Cascade Books, 2008), 86-101, at 96-7.

<sup>46</sup> See the discussion of Thomas Aquinas on the old law in the *Summa Theologiae*, I-II q. 99, a 2.

<sup>47</sup> See *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 94, a. 4.

and with the tendency of many contemporaries to confuse natural moral law with natural laws in a physical or biological sense.

Even with this qualification, the claim that human reason can discern moral principles from reflecting on the world and human society involves the discernment of inherent purposes in the natural order, an attitude or framework of thought that is foreign to modern thought. The conservative appeal to such principles is met with strong skepticism and resistance. The reasons for this are highly important, but complex, woven into the development of the culture of western modernity during the last five hundred years. The development of western science involved a shift away from an Aristotelian teleological view of nature to an inert instrumental view of nature subject to human will. The meanings and purposes of nature, including human beings and their social arrangements, have been regarded in the common modern western view as imposed by human will rather than inherent in the order of things.

If we take, for example, the world's wealth of land, mineral resources, water, forests, and so on, as so much raw material, simply "there" in existence (which is the common modern view) then it is up to us to decide what to do with them. We impose principles of ownership and use by social and political agreement. What even most Christians have largely forgotten is the conviction—so foundational for Augustine and the church fathers, as well as for Aquinas and the scholastics, because it is inherent in the biblical creation narratives—that the resources of the world were provided by God to sustain humankind in general. To hoard and to squander natural resources, or to ruin or destroy sections of the earth, which from a modern and very common free market and private property point of view are legitimate and part of the "right" of ownership, are really an abuse of the fundamental purpose of God's intention in creation to make generous provision for humanity in general, and are also contrary to God's instructions to tend and preserve creation (cf. Gen 2:15).

The most operative influence in the current suspicion of a natural law line of argument (especially as applied to sexual relations) is the discredit stemming from the abuses and false claims made for natural law in the past. The struggle for equality in civil rights in the United States and the world wide feminist movement have both exposed the shabby and self-serving arguments to support racism and male prerogatives on the basis of the supposed natural inferiority of blacks or women's inability to function as rationally as men. Many of these differences which seemed to many people of the Victorian period to be rooted in nature are recognized by most of our society to be generated largely by social convention or prejudice.

Because the argument for an objective moral order seems to have so little force in modern thinking, many western Christians appear to agree with the position of liberals and well-meaning institutional officials who categorize opposition to same-sex marriage as based on the same kind of ignorant prejudice and unenlightened attitudes which prevailed in colonies established by western nations, in sections of America before the civil rights movement, and in institutions that treated women as inferior.

## *Natural Law and Sexual Relations*

A strictly Darwinian point of view would reduce the purposes of sex to the preservation and betterment of the species. To the reductionist social biologist, all the psychological and romantic aspects of courtship and being in love are simply cultural constructs to increase the desire to set aside objections to the difficulties and costs of child rearing, and to fulfill the fundamental biological urge to procreate and enhance the human species. There is one procreative “purpose” to sexual relations, and all the romantic and pleasurable aspects are useful concomitants.

The Christian tradition, on the other hand, when it has more formally reflected on these matters, as in the theologies of Augustine and Aquinas, has discerned in human sexual relations two fundamental purposes: to produce children and to create a special bond of affection and support. In both the modern Catholic language of the encyclicals, and in Protestant ethical thought, these are known as the procreative and unitive purposes.

On the importance of holding the relational aspects of marriage together with procreation, we cite the influential Protestant ethicist, Paul Ramsey (who was an important transmitter to Protestants of many important principles from Catholic moral theology), expressed well this view of sex and natural law: “sexual intercourse tends, of its own nature, toward the expression and strengthening of love and towards the engendering of children. Let us call these two goods, or intrinsic ends, of sexual intercourse its relational or unitive and its procreative purpose.”<sup>48</sup> These differ from the purposes of *marriage* in the Book of Common Prayer in that they are discerned philosophically or by general moral reflection and do not include the additional theological purposes of Christian marriage, remedy for sin, and the sacramental signification of Christ and His Church.

The stories of Genesis bring out both the procreative and unitive purposes: “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28); and the recognition of Adam’s need for companionship (“it is not good that man should be alone,” Gen. 2:18), followed by the creation of a new family unit when husband and wife leave their parental homes and become one flesh together.

The pre-eminence that used to be given to procreation as the primary good (reflected in the Roman Catholic tradition *before* the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*<sup>49</sup>) should be seen as an understandable but regrettable distortion. There is logic in seeing the future of the human species as fundamental and the romantic elements as ancillary or subservient to the purpose of procreation. Thomas Aquinas may give this impression in his defense of the permanence of marriage (and the sin of fornication) based on the lengthy time required for child-rearing and the good of a stable home,<sup>50</sup> but in his defense we can note that Aquinas also affirmed the unitive good of marital friendship and the inherent good of sexual pleasure. It is also possible to construct an argument, as Philip Turner has done, defending the permanence and exclusivity of sexual relations based not on the procreative

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Ramsey, *One Flesh: A Christian View of Sex Within, Outside and Before Marriage* (Grove Booklet on Ethics No. 8; Bramcote, Notts: Grove Books, 1975), 4.

<sup>49</sup> See for example the 1930 papal encyclical *Casti Connubii* that made procreation the primary purpose, whereas *Humanae Vitae* considers the procreative and unitive ends of sexual relations as equally essential.

<sup>50</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 154, a. 2.

good, but on the relational good, reflecting on the nature of committed human love.<sup>51</sup>

Where the Christian tradition would have affirmed that the *nature* of sexual relations implied the inherently dual—and inherently combined—purpose of procreation and marital friendship, the modern view tends to separate these purposes. The blessing of same-sex unions would contribute to the sundering or voiding of this nexus of meaning, and so lead to further confusion about basic Christian views on sexual identities and relationships. However, there are other factors in modern thinking as well. The prospect of over-population and scarcity of resources has changed procreation from a self-evident purpose to fulfill to something that requires special moral justification. This has made it seem all the more reasonable to see the romantic, unitive purpose of sexual relations as completely determinative. With the relegation of any procreative purpose, then the unitive purpose no longer serves child rearing or family life, but instead serves self-expression, personal pleasure, and marital friendship of varying degrees of commitment. Procreation becomes an entirely optional “project” for those so inclined or for those guided by social expectations.

The liberal view of same-sex marriage depends on eliminating procreation as an inherent meaning of sexual relations. This allows the liberal to argue that same-sex marriages can embody a kind of complementarity that is based on psychological or social fulfillment or incorporation of the “other” which is parallel to, or a valid variation of, ordinary heterosexual male-female complementarity.<sup>52</sup>

This is where the conservative response must be firm: the inherent procreative purpose of sexual relationships must be respected and embodied in Christian marriage. This does not require the unnecessarily stringent requirement of respect for procreation in every sexual act (as implied in *Humanae Vitae*), nor does it imply that a marriage foreseen to be childless (e.g. when the parties to the marriage are beyond normal child-rearing age); but it does, at the very least, imply a marital partnership of a man and a woman. If the procreative purpose of sexual relations is co-determinative with the unitive and social purpose, then it automatically defines the romantic or social marital union as a male-female one, since that is the only union that could, as a sexual relationship, be procreative.

In describing the essential relation of man and woman in sex and marriage, Oliver O’Donovan puts the matter in a clear and conclusive way:

The dimorphic organization of human sexuality, the particular attraction of two adults of the opposite sex and of different parents, the setting up of a home. . . and the uniting of their lives. . . form a pattern of human fulfillment which serves the wider end of enabling procreation to occur in a context of affection and loyalty. *Whatever happens in history, Christians have wished to say, this is what marriage really is.* Particular cultures may have distorted it;

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<sup>51</sup> See “Real Sex” in P. Turner, *Sex, Money and Power: An Essay in Christian Social Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1985), 45-70.

<sup>52</sup> See the helpful treatment of the view of sexual difference in the Christian tradition as compared to some modern liberal views in Christopher C. Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007).



individuals may fall short of it. It is to their cost in either case; for it reasserts itself as God's creative intention for human relationships on earth...."<sup>53</sup>

That we suppose ourselves to have moved beyond this, or that we can reconfigure the goods of marriage which can be discerned by natural law, says something significant about ourselves as modern thinkers, and not about the nature of marriage itself, which from the point of view of a theology of creation must remain constant and consistent.

## Part 4

### Concluding Reflections

There has been a strong desire in recent decades to emphasize an orientation to mission as something inherent and constitutive of the nature of the church. The high-profile issue of homosexuality in our culture is an important testing point of our relationship with contemporary culture and of the soundness of our strategy of witness and mission.

Our discussion of the evidence of science and insights from philosophy on the issue of homosexuality is meant to help us draw practical conclusions and guidelines for a collective decision about same-sex marriage, and not merely to help our theoretical understanding. This then brings us squarely into the forum of our contemporary culture, whether in its modernist or post-modern mood. This realm of culture is of great concern to the church as it tries to engage its context and communicate its message. The standard contemporary terms for describing this area of the church's relationship to culture have been "enculturation" or "contextualization," which lead us to pose the question: What would a properly enculturated or contextualized theology of sexuality for the Church in North America look like?

The liberal approach tends to respond to that challenge in a way overly favorable to the surrounding culture. As conservatives, we want the church to be faithful to the Great Commission and to find the best ways to witness to our culture, having in mind the warning and encouragement articulated by the apostle Paul: "do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed in the renewing of your minds..." (Rom 12:2). The issue before us now, whether to approve of same-sex marriage, is for our time a major challenge to the quality and confidence of our Christian minds: do we judge homosexuality in light of the standards of our culture or in conformity with the mind of Christ?

This discernment cannot simply rely upon the growing consensus in the general public and society's legislatures and law courts to determine our attitudes and positions, because the church needs to be faithful to its own theological criteria for assessment and above all to be faithful to the will of our Lord. The appeal to justice and fairness, which carries so much weight in public opinion and in civil society, should not be the determining consideration.

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<sup>53</sup> O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 69 (italics added).

We should all be more aware of those salient features of our culture as a whole, which unconsciously shape our attitudes, skew our perceptions, and distort our decisions. Through sexuality, modern western culture (as seen in much of its literature, cinema, music, popular culture, consumerism, and fascination with shallow celebrity) seeks a set of goods largely different from what Christian theology wants to affirm. Instead of a proper emphasis on faithfulness and mutual service as the context for affection, sexual pleasure, and family life, the goods desired by our society are often gratification, self-expression, narcissism, and novel experiences. The consumerist nature of modern society affects sexuality by commodifying and depersonalizing sexual experience. The modern technological mentality leads us to treat sex and other areas of responsible behavior as devoid of meaning in themselves, and thus allows us to give ourselves the freedom to impose our own values and needs under the framework of a right to our chosen self-expression. These features of modern cultural attitudes are often heightened in North America where we find even stronger emphasis on individualism and subjective autonomy. Understanding the nature of this intellectual and cultural history is of great importance in realizing why traditional Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality has lost much of its persuasive power.

#### *Where We Are Now*

We can set down as a clear expression of our position a section of the “St Andrew’s Day Statement” offered about fifteen years ago by a number of respected theologians in the Church of England:

The primary pastoral task of the church in relation to all its members, whatever self-understanding and mode of life, is to reaffirm the good news of salvation in Christ, forgiveness of sins, transformation of life and incorporation into the holy fellowship of the church. In addressing those who understand themselves as homosexual, the church does not cease to speak as the bearer of this good news. It assists all its members to a life of faithful witness in chastity and holiness, recognizing two forms of vocations in which that life can be lived: marriage and singleness (Gen 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6, 1 Cor 7 passim). There is no place for the church to confer legitimacy upon alternatives to these.<sup>54</sup>

We also agree with the authors who follow this statement with the recognition that a “certain flexibility” is required in responding to different individuals and circumstances, and to discern ways in which the Gospel touches people in different situations.<sup>55</sup>

Many readers and observers, both within and outside of the Church, will interpret any provision short of marriage for homosexuals as unfair, lacking in compassion, and

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<sup>54</sup> “The St. Andrew’s Day Statement” in T. Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward: Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 5-11 at 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

perpetuating attitudes that liberals feel called to challenge and change. In the light of our position in support of traditional Christian marriage articulated above, we believe that the range of legitimate possible pastoral responses, as policy for the Episcopal Church (or for a diocese or parish), is limited. For the individual counselor or parish priest there may be room for some discretion or flexibility, but given that the demand is for same sex *marriage*, it is difficult to see room for compromise.

There is the option of simply continuing the “policy” of not doing or saying very much at all on an official level, combined with pastoral openness. More so than in the past, there will be parishes, bishops, and priests who know that many parishioners are in fact homosexual, and realize that the church has always had a percentage of homosexual members in its midst. This ambiguous treatment is unsatisfactory for many gays and lesbians, however, who feel that they need to hide an important part of their identity when engaged in worship or other parish activities or simply to belong to the church.

This is analogous to the notorious “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy of the American military sanctioned by president Clinton, and still in effect (at the time of writing), where there is a tacit understanding all around that homosexuals are understood to make up a certain percentage of the military, and that there will be no official attempt to harass or discourage them; on the other hand, gay and lesbian soldiers and officers do not have permission to live in open and active same-sex relationships.

Life in a parish, we note, is often far better than this crude military policy. Many parish priests are trusted as confessors, counselors and confidants, so that there is often the possibility of individual understanding and support in spite of the lack of official diocesan or parochial affirmation. There must be many (probably the majority) of traditional parish priests in this position who do not feel able to change their position on the theology of marriage, but have ongoing affirmative relationships with individuals (or couples) who are gay or lesbian, and who encourage them to be part of parish life.

Traditionalists understand homosexual attraction as not following the intended order of creation. Even if we do not use the explicit language of the Roman Catholic magisterium,<sup>56</sup> same-sex relationships fall short of the order for sexual relationships affirmed in Genesis and in the teaching of Jesus. But so do many other sexual relationships in modern life, including, of course those of many Christians and church members. Clergy are faced with parishioners having affairs and experiencing marriage breakdowns; and, in the last generation or two, young couples who are living together, some of whom seek Christian marriage in the local church. The difference is that the parish priest (conservative ones, at any rate), will point out that such pre-marital sexual liaisons, even those which eventually do result in marital commitment, fall short of the biblical standards for marriage, and that a Christian wedding is a good opportunity for the pastor to deal with the element of disorder and conform the relationship to Christian standards.

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<sup>56</sup> See the “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986),” reprinted in C Curran and R. McCormick (eds.), *Readings in Moral Theology No. 8: Dialogue about Catholic Sexual Teaching* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1993), 297-308.

The theologian Helmut Thielicke reminded us about fifty years ago of the vulnerabilities and frustrations faced by homosexuals who live with the combination of secret temptations and the need for a deceptive appearance in public. The Christian ethicist and pastor must be aware of and sensitive to this situation.<sup>57</sup> One benefit of the much greater openness in the last generation or two about homosexuality is the diminished pressure to disguise sexual orientation and the decrease in opprobrium.

### *Abstinence and Christian Discipleship*

Thielicke spoke in the 1950s of helping people to “sublimate” their homosexual urges.<sup>58</sup> There is a quaintness about this in the twenty-first century, and many may feel something impractical about it (on a large scale), much as some view the “abstinence only” style of conservative school sex education programs. Even though misunderstood and mocked in many circles, this aspect of Christian discipleship must remain a strong part of the church’s pastoral teaching. After all, learning to refuse to indulge sexual urges is part of the general spiritual discipline that needs to be developed in many other areas of life and is part of the way of the cross. This aspect of Christian discipleship applies, of course, not just to the homosexually inclined, but to all those not in a marital relationship: we think of the widowed and divorced, college students and other youth before marriage, and those whose circumstances involve long periods of separation from spouses. Many people are looking for instruction and practical help in this area of Christian training.

### *The possibility of change in orientation*

We note that in the 1950s Helmut Thielicke wrote from the premise that “the great majority of homosexuals” are in a condition that is not susceptible to medical or psychotherapeutic treatment.<sup>59</sup> Even on those assumptions, however, that would still leave a minority who experience unwanted same-sex attractions and might benefit from a course of counseling or treatment aimed at developing heterosexual inclinations.

We realize that this will seem wrong-headed and even arrogant to many, including many heterosexuals, who feel sympathy with the important GLBT movement. We must admit the dangers involved in such counseling, and the risk of increasing confusion and alienation. But even if we do agree that any talk of change towards heterosexuality is inappropriate and unhelpful in many cases, there is still evidence that some positive and beneficial change can and does take place as a result of some ministries and programs. With the help of a number of recent studies, and recognizing that this area is still somewhat unclear and very controversial, it seems fair to say that a modest percentage (perhaps 10-15%) of those with same-sex attractions can achieve noticeable change<sup>60</sup>

Admittedly, this pastoral approach applies only to a minority—nevertheless it should not

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<sup>57</sup> H. Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex* (London: James Clarke, 1964), 286-7; the Eng. trans. was published later as the third volume of *Theological Ethics*, the first German edition of which was published in 1958-9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 287.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 283-4.

<sup>60</sup> See our summary above in the section on Science and Homosexuality with reference to Glynn Harrison’s study, “Unwanted Same-Sex Attractions: Can Pastoral and Counseling Interventions Help People to Change?” in P. Groves (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, 293-332 at 328.

be dismissed as impossible or unethical. Because there is a continuum between homo- and heterosexual inclinations, and some fluidity between them, as well as a lack of agreement about the actual genesis of homosexual inclinations (genetic, environmental, relational and cultural causes), it seems inappropriate to deny a voice in our discussions to ex-gays, those who have left homosexual lifestyles (but may still have same-sex inclinations), and to those involved in responsible ministry programs with them.

To deny the very possibility of change in the complicated process of sexual inclination and attachment seems akin, theologically, to a couple of questionable approaches to solve difficult theological and pastoral problems with an a priori definition. One example would be the ultra-Calvinist doctrine of eternal security, where defenders of the “once saved, always saved” principle deal with those who leave the church or seem to abandon faith in Christ as simple impossibilities: if they have no faith now, then they were never Christians at all. Similarly, under the Roman Catholic doctrine of marriage, if a separation or breakdown occurs between two Christians sacramentally married, then it must be the case that the marriage is still valid anyway, or that it was never a proper marriage in the first place (hence many annulments which function as quasi-divorces).

As pastoral provisions for homosexuals these options of sublimation, abstinence, and therapeutic change where appropriate are limited, to be sure. Sublimation and abstinence—i.e., chastity—in the context of Christian discipleship, will present a challenge for us to present as an attractive option in modern culture, we admit. In most cases, with heterosexual young people, for example, chastity (as abstinence) is normally meant to be a temporary aspect of moral character, in preparation for marital chastity. It is one thing for young singles, the newly divorced and recently widowed to learn (or relearn) chastity as a single person again, and quite another for single homosexuals who face, without an option for marriage, an entire lifetime of singleness. We recognize the extra burden and challenge involved. The call and gift to live a celibate life is rightly seen as a special vocation, given to individuals both heterosexual and homosexual who respond to the call to celibacy in conjunction with a special (usually religious) vocation. We are aware that the traditionalist opposition to same-sex marriage will seem inflexible and even wrong-headed; and the injustice of a position requiring all gays and lesbians either to adhere to *life-long* abstinence or to seriously contemplate a course of counseling toward heterosexual attraction will make the possible provision of Christian same-sex marriage seem a very reasonable and compassionate solution.

We need to explain further the basis for our opposition to this widely attractive line of reasoning in our Church, namely, to have as official policy the open acceptance and blessing of same-sex relationships, even if they might well reflect the same level of commitment and permanence as heterosexual marriages. We can make a few additional points to explain our reluctance and resistance.

1. First, the apparent injustice of imposing abstinence on gays and lesbians is partly a reflection of the modern tolerance, even in church circles, of temporary and semi-committed sexual relationships between young men and women. This tolerance points to doubts or confusion about the truth or relevance of the standards of self-discipline and self-denial that need to be applied to sexual behavior. These modern doubts reflect the common and unspoken assumption that an active sexual relationship is necessary for a

fulfilling human life, unless there is a special grace given by the Spirit for celibacy. The clear implication is that living one's adulthood as a single person without a sexual relationship is so difficult that only a select few can be expected to receive this charism.<sup>61</sup>

2. Further, there are many heterosexuals whose circumstances call for living their adult lives as chaste single persons (and without a vocation to celibacy): those who postpone marriage in favor of a career (or are forced to because of circumstances) and then find few or no prospects for a good marriage later on; those who face social situations with an imbalance in the number of eligible potential spouses;<sup>62</sup> those who are disabled or disfigured due to disease or accident and have few marriage prospects; and there are many men and women who had high ideals for a potential spouse and found no one to meet them, as well as those who would very much like to have married but simply found no one with whom to enter into a marriage covenant. All of these groups form a considerable section of the population, who have not chosen to live life as singles, nor had a special vocation to celibacy, but have had singleness and chastity imposed on them through circumstance.

3. A third point deserves some attention. We are concerned for a number of homosexuals who have turned away from living with sexual partners because they have responded to the challenge of Christian discipleship and have the understanding that this means abstinence from all sexual relationships. The acceptance of same-sex marriage within the church undercuts some of the rationale for their understanding of the relation of their sexuality to living the Christian life. Thus, while we on the grounds of justice or compassion attempt to make provision for some homosexual persons, by accepting same-sex relationships under the framework of holiness, we may well be adding to the burden of others who have same-sex attractions, and increasing the potential discouragement of many homosexual Christians who are quietly pursuing their call to Christian discipleship within the traditional moral boundaries.

The testimony of a homosexual Anglican in England who is not at all convinced that homosexual relationships are pleasing to God, writes candidly, "I know many Anglicans (including leaders) with a homosexual orientation, but seeking celibacy, who have said privately they will feel betrayed if the Church of England changes its traditional viewpoint on homosexuality. Some say they already feel tempted to leave the Church of England."<sup>63</sup>

The starkness of the conservative position is tempered by the reminder that it is our eroticized and materialist culture that creates the framework so inimical to chastity and

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<sup>61</sup> The growing movement within the Roman Catholic Church to end the requirement of clerical celibacy is often supported by assertions that it is wrong to expect *all* priests to receive the gift of celibacy at their ordination.

<sup>62</sup> Consider England (and other countries) after WW I when the supply of young men for a whole generation was substantially reduced; or consider present-day China and India where the supply of young women does not meet the demand for marriages because of culturally or politically imposed child-selection practices.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Hallett, "Truth and Love in Our Sexual Feelings," in Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward*, 130.

self-control. In a Christian theological perspective, our identity as members of the body of Christ define who we are, and not personal sexual feelings and experiences. As the St. Andrew's Day Statement puts it: "At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as 'a' homosexual or 'a' heterosexual; there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation."<sup>64</sup>

We need to put into proper perspective the inflated importance we naturally attach to sexual fulfillment and even marriage. We have the teaching of Jesus about the disappearance of marriage and family relationships in the kingdom of heaven, and we have the examples and teaching of both Jesus and Paul, who made clear that physical sexual needs, expressions, and relationships are temporary and secondary compared to our destiny as co-heirs with Christ. "The goal for homosexual and heterosexual alike is fulfillment and wholeness in Christ."<sup>65</sup> Recovery and proclamation of that conviction is the challenge for our Church.

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<sup>64</sup> "The St. Andrew's Day Statement," in Bradshaw (ed.), *The Way Forward*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> D. H. Field, "Homosexuality," in *The New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 453.

## **A Theology of Marriage including Same-Sex Couples:**

### **A View from the Liberals**

**Deirdre J. Good, General Theological Seminary**  
**Cynthia B. Kittredge, Seminary of the Southwest**  
**Eugene F. Rogers, University of North Carolina, Greensboro**  
**Willis J. Jenkins, Yale Divinity School**

*Marriage is a discipline. Marriage is a means of grace. Marriage is a discipline and a means of grace for sinners. Marriage is a discipline and a means of grace for sinners and for the whole church. It is a discipline because its vows are for better or worse. It is a means of grace because it signifies the love of Christ for the church.*

*We argue that the church should marry same-sex couples, because it requires their testimony to the love of Christ and the church, and because it recognizes that same-sex couples stand in need of sanctification no less than opposite-sex couples. In grafting same-sex marriage onto the domestic rite, the church follows the pattern of God's grafting wild, Gentile olive branches onto the domesticated olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:24). The church does so because same-sex couples need the sanctification that marriage teaches, and the church needs the marital virtues that same-sex couples are already receiving. We would expand the theology of marriage to include same-sex couples based on our corporate life of faith in the Episcopal Church and our re-reading of the Christian tradition. This vision of marriage is offered not in arrogance, naiveté, or spiritual enthusiasm, but in trust and with hope, as our witness to the mission of Christ.*

*In what follows we explain how the marriage rite initiates couples into an arduous discipline, a training in sanctification. This account of marriage does not minimize procreation and chastity, but follows the Book of Common Prayer in upholding the context of those gifts: "the union of Christ and his Church" by which "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5.19).<sup>1</sup> This is not so much a new theology of marriage, as one explicit in Eastern Orthodoxy and implicit, as we shall show, in the prayers and vows of the Book of Common Prayer. We portray the world that marriage can make if extended to same-sex couples. We base our argument, then, not on autonomy, individualism, or personal experience, but on the embodied discipline—that of marriage—by which God may transform longing into charity and dispositions to love into works of virtue. Can we credit what we pray in the marriage rite, that God may "make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair" (BCP, 429)? Our argument arises from the power of prayer, the marriage prayer of the church. Does it make sense for two women or two men? Do same-sex couples, in spite of all that opposes them, nevertheless fit the marriage prayer? This proposal is not intended to*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer . . . According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation and The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 423. Future references (BCP) by page number in text.



*exclude those who disagree, to replace an old exclusion with a new one, but to pose a question: Does this proposal about marriage fit with our understanding of how God prepares us for life with himself, by binding us for life to another?*

## **Mission, Scripture, and a Confession**

### *Mission*

By mission does the church live; "you shall be my witnesses," says the risen Jesus (Acts 1:8). Disagreements among the churches over blessing the marriages of same-sex couples arise from mission's zeal. Traditionalists worry that some forms of welcoming same-sex couples would imperil the church's proclamation of the gospel. Some have even been willing to break bonds and create new ecclesial structures for the sake of that mission. Expansionists have become convinced that marital blessings for same-sex couples will advance the church's proclamation of the gospel.<sup>2</sup> Some have been willing to break bonds and risk new ecclesial practices for the sake of that mission. Because Christian marriage bears witness to the reality of Jesus Christ for the world, such missional zeal over the question of blessing the marriages of same-sex couples should come as no surprise.

The full name of the Episcopal Church is "The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America." Our polity and ethos still reflect the character of a missionary society, and our theological tensions arise, in part, from different senses of how our church should bear witness. Arguments over theology and Scripture in the context of mission are hardly new. In Acts we find the earliest church arguing over how to understand the mission of Jesus Christ, and there was "no small dissension and debate with them" (15:2). The New Testament was formed in the midst of churches arguing over how to read their Scriptures in the presence of the Spirit and an unexpectedly expanded company of readers. Our arguments over eligibility for the rites of marriage take a similar form, as an argumentative missionary society tries to understand, in an expanded company of readers, how the Spirit makes marriage a witness to Christ.

Churches must discern their way into mission because it does not originate from the church, but is first the activity of the triune God—*missio Dei*—in which the church seeks to take part. Mission begins with the Father sending the Son and the Spirit to bring into the feast those different from himself. "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven." In Acts we see the church hastening to follow the Son by the leading of the Spirit: "we are witnesses to these things and so is the Holy Spirit" (5:32). The Spirit leads in showing the church how to bear witness to Christ. In mission, the Trinity goes out from itself, in that the Father sends the Son for the sake of communion with the world,

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<sup>2</sup> Names for the parties to a debate cannot avoid attracting their own controversy. We refer to ourselves here as "expansionist," not without some reservations, in order to identify with our argument for a particular change in liturgical practice. We do not speak officially for a theological school or ecclesial tradition, although we occasionally refer to "liberals" and "conservatives," when gesturing to colloquial categories.

with those different from himself, and sends the Spirit to realize and interpret, celebrate and solemnize that communion. As did the apostles Peter, Stephen, and Paul, the church recognizes the Spirit's witness by recounting the narrative of salvation among those gathered by the Spirit. The church learns how to bear witness by reading, eating, and praying with all those God has called to bear witness. The church takes part in the missions of the trinitarian Persons when she goes out from the Father in the person of the Son for the community the Spirit makes.

As a "Domestic" Missionary Society, the Episcopal Church must seek to proclaim the gospel to its neighbors in its cultural context. Those neighbors include same-sex couples in a culture obsessed with sex and confused about marriage. The Song of Songs has long been interpreted as a parable of the love between God and God's people, and Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son" (Mt 22:2). Yet proclaiming the love of God for God's people in this culture has pressed the Episcopal Church to attend, with pastoral care and evangelical attentiveness, to the testimony of same-sex couples. There it has discovered, in those couples who desire to give their lives in self-donation to one another, movements of the Spirit within same-sex relationships. "God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit" (Acts 15:8). So, while the Episcopal Church was considering how to offer the work of God to non-heterosexual persons, it has found itself standing witness to the Spirit already making community, already on mission beyond the bounds. While we have equivocated, the Spirit has been expanding the church.

As a "Foreign" Missionary Society, the Episcopal Church must also give account of its domestic mission to its companions in mission around the Communion and to the universal church. Zeal for mission may divide the church, but while the Spirit may move wildly and diversely, it always moves within the *missio Dei*. Much as Acts 15 describes a council in Jerusalem to discuss how Gentiles should be welcomed into the church's universal mission, so does the church today hold theological council. And in a similar pneumatological pattern, it seems the Spirit has preceded us, transforming the church and its mission. In the self-donation of same-sex couples to one another and to the church, some leaders of the church see surprising gifts of the Spirit. Even when same-sex couples were in the wilderness, God "gave his good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst" (Neh. 9:20, para. Acts 10:47). Can anyone withhold the rite for blessing these couples "who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47).

The church's longstanding practice of blessing nuptial rites is a sacrament in which the church bears witness to the love that Christ shows for the world and the community that the Spirit makes. In marriage, the couple give their bodies over to one another and to the church to become a sign of God's reconciliation; they pattern desire "in the image of God's constancy."<sup>3</sup> In blessing marriages, the church celebrates God's mission by employing a social and legal institution that changes over time and place to represent the

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<sup>3</sup> David Matzko McCarthy, "The Relationship of Bodies: A Nuptial Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Unions," in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 200-216; here, p. 210.

love of God for God's people. As cultural habits of marriage and partnership change, the church's following of the Son by the Spirit meets challenges. Cultural changes may work good or evil. Never simple, change calls for historical understanding and theological interpretation.

In North America, social and political changes have reshaped gender roles and identities, permitting more opportunities for work and leadership by women as well as by sexual minorities. Women and sexual minorities have won greater freedom to participate in public, economic, and religious life. In some states, civil rights laws offer legal protections to same-sex partnerships. Christian efforts for social justice have inspired and supported some of these changes.

We do not argue that those changes represent the progress of enlightenment over ignorance, western values over lesser ones, or Christian values over worldly ones. That would be simplistic, for at the same time social practices of marriage and divorce have suffered from shallow and mistaken notions of freedom. Sex fascinates, confuses, and sometimes tyrannizes our culture. Within our consumer society the question of same-sex marriage can seem just one more lifestyle option within a marketplace of sexual, reproductive, and familial options. Sometimes the ethos of consumer choices creates commodification, violence, and other dehumanizing forms of relationship.

While the question of same-sex marriage arises within those wider social changes, our church's situation is hardly one of simply accepting or rejecting a surrounding culture. We seek to bear witness to Christ within a society that supports historical movements for freedom and justice, yet struggles to understand sexuality and marriage and seems baffled by desire and love. How the church receives the question of same-sex marriage therefore shapes how it will bear witness to God's justice, to God's marriage with God's people, to God's desire for the world.

Amidst these cultural changes, supported by broader currents of social justice, lesbian and gay members of churches have come out of hiding. They have known themselves as beloved children of God, and have begun to interpret their lives and relationships in light of God's companionship, and to understand their sense of identity and their struggles within the mission of the church. Others in the church have listened and tried to understand this testimony corporately in light of Christian tradition. Christians who know themselves to be gay receive calls to ordination and leadership in the community. Parents teach the gospel to their lesbian and gay children. Adolescent young women and men look to the church for patterns of holy living. As the Spirit has contrived with social change to deepen our church's community, the company of readers interpreting Scripture and bearing witness to God's mission has expanded. Some of us have offered lives as *logoi* in the *Logos*, or words in the Word, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1 John 1:1-2).

With visibility and voice for gay and lesbian Christians has come understanding and compassion, increased questioning of the conventions excluding and condemning same-

sex relationships, and reflection on our liturgical rites and theological teaching in response to their Christian lives and testimony. The need to think theologically about same-sex couples, their role in the church, and their work as ordained leaders has taken on urgency, not simply for individuals and couples who seek recognition and acceptance, but for the Christian community as a whole: other married persons, children, clergy, parents, and teachers. Many members of the church report something like the growing sense of Peter, moving from puzzlement to protest to a new conviction: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality...but anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34).

### *Reading Scripture*

As Christian theologians, Scripture is authoritative for our work and we participate in the church's ongoing interpretation of the Bible. The church's expanded company of those reading and following Scripture, and its differing desires to live in communion with sinners, to become blessings to one another, have led to different teachings from Scripture. Because Scripture demands to be interpreted in accord with the mission of God, we should not so confine it to any one sense, as to expose the faith to ridicule (Augustine, *Confessions* V.5, *De Genesi ad litteram* 1; Aquinas, *De potentia* 4, 1, r). For different mission partners will inevitably ridicule the faith in some way, causing the church to see different aspects of the truth that God desires holiness. This view of Scripture is the view of Augustine: that God gives us the difficult work of interpreting Scripture in order to make finite, sin-darkened readers capable of growing into the truth. Scripture gives itself to many readings that its readers may slowly learn to orient their desire to God's desire for them.

Alongside the marriage practices described in Scripture, even in their variety, our proposal that the Church extend marriage to same-sex couples appears transgressive. Yet, within the testimony of the early church's way of reading Scripture, it appears to fit the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15, 23) that exceeds Paul's expectation by grafting wild branches onto the domestic olive (Rom 11:24). Acts portrays the apostles and the earliest church as following the presence of the Spirit even when the Spirit's activity seemed to exceed the plain sense of Scripture. In Romans and Galatians, Paul must defend the astonishing inclusion of Gentiles, which exceeded theological assumptions, and elaborate the coherence of a way of life that ran against moral assumptions. We argue here, that analogously, marrying same-sex couples comports with the mission of God celebrated by the Spirit in the body of Christ, even though it seems to exceed the marriage practices assumed by Scripture and honored by tradition.

Interpreting marriage so that male-female complementarity is typical but not exhaustive of its witness requires reinterpreting the male-female symbol system that runs throughout the biblical texts. Interpreting the aptitude of same-sex marriage for bearing witness to Christ requires acknowledging the apparent rejection of same-sex relations in some texts and the use of those texts by subsequent tradition. Our argument, therefore, must support an unexpected interpretation—astonishing to some. We will elaborate the coherence of a

marriage practice that runs contrary to received moral assumptions and exceeds the social forms assumed by biblical texts. In a pattern similar to that of Peter and James, Barnabas and Paul, our argument does not seek to annul or disprove prior moral judgments of Scripture; rather it interprets them within the witness to Christ that the Spirit makes.

Old and New Testament authors assume male-female marriage. We do not claim that biblical writers imagined or anticipated marriages of two women or two men. The New Testament does, however, give evidence that the followers of Jesus and the churches begun by Paul and other missionaries took a skeptical perspective on both male-female marriage and the patriarchal family. In Mark, Jesus makes the true mark of a sibling and kindred relationship doing the will of God (Mk. 3:31-35). Paul's letters show that both he and some members of the churches understood baptism into Christ to commend celibacy (1 Cor 7). Many texts in the gospels and letters attest to the ascetic character of these early communities. Later Christian writers then reasserted the primacy of marriage and the household as the model for the shape of the church. Marriage practices supported by the early church therefore hold in tension both those who radically relativize the traditional family in preference for celibacy or "spiritual" family and those that make the traditional family, what we would call today the "biological family" the sole Christian model. Our approach combines the two New Testament values of asceticism and household: marriage is a school for virtue, a household asceticism: "for better for worse," "forsaking all others" (Book of Common Prayer 427, 424).

The history of interpreting these diverse texts has yielded various kinds of support for gender relations, sexual understanding, and marital practice. In different periods and with distinctive priorities they have celebrated the superiority of celibacy and the vocation of Christian marriage, promoted a celibate male priesthood and a married clergy, restricted ordination to males and lately extended it to women. Guided by the reading of Scripture in the prayers and blessing of marriage in the Book of Common Prayer, we argue that faithful marriage partnership can also be the aspiration of same-sex couples just as it is for opposite-sex couples. Adapted to include partners of the same sex, Christian marriage still retains procreation as one of its purposes (BCP, 423). Marriage creates a family and a home for the nurture of children. Beyond the good of procreation, marriage makes the conditions for companionship and friendship that God intends both for mutual joy and for the sanctification and maturation of the individuals within it. We testify that in this, God shows no partiality. Opposite-sex as well as same-sex couples who engage in this covenant undertake extraordinary promises in the face of great odds and with God's help make a vivid witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the church established in his name.

"It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" that they should marry (Acts 15:28). Reading Scripture for the way marriage bears witness to God seems to depend at least in part on how a reading community understands the mission of God in its context. We read in the community that the Spirit makes. Because the Spirit spans the centuries, our argument reads Scripture in the company of patristic interpreters as well as in the company of readers long silenced by the tradition.

The church learns how to interpret Scripture by being the Body of Christ. It learns the truth of Scripture by living from marriage to its Bridegroom, and therefore not from self-

sufficiency but from self-donation to another. That means that the church reads Scripture not in purity but from mission, a mission that must leave it changed. The church takes part in the mission of the Trinity when she goes out from the Father in the person of the Son and in the community of the Spirit. She evangelizes others and herself by going out of herself and receiving into herself those who are different, as the Son and Spirit do in their missions.

Many in the Episcopal Church have felt driven by the Spirit into community with gay and lesbian Christians. It is no scandal that a church finds herself driven into the desert, into the houses of sinners, or to the Gentiles, and that in going to those places feels herself drawn by the Spirit and preceded by her Lord. The question is whether the church evangelizes in those places and if she receives fruits of the Spirit. The church evangelizes same-sex couples by drawing them to represent the marriage of the Son with his bride. They come to share in his martyrdom by putting their bodies on the line for one another as heterosexual married couples do. Similarly, the church evangelizes itself by having community with another. She enacts the identity to which the Spirit calls and the Lord leads her. But how does the Spirit change the church?

Reading with the Spirit may change Scripture's interpretation. If it does it can only be because the Spirit changes the interpreter. The Spirit must change the interpreter, if it is to lead us into "all truth" (John 16:13). The Spirit must change the interpreter because we learn over time. After the Fall, the Spirit must also change the interpreter because we are sinners. Without growth in wisdom that the Spirit directs, immature readers will inevitably read Scripture in ignorance. Without repentance Christians will inevitably read Scripture "in ways that support their own sinful beliefs and practices." Both learning and repentance are therefore necessary but neither is sufficient. Repentance without hope would be despair, and learning without love is sterile. Rather, "recognition of sinfulness must lead one into the practices of forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation."<sup>4</sup> These are the practices that take us out of ourselves and fascination with our own sin, and into community with one another. The Spirit of love must issue in love.

How does the Spirit hold together in love this company of people who differ in following the Son, to whom God shows no partiality, but who fear God and seek to do what is right? Under conditions of sin, the communion that the Trinity, the church, and the baptized seek with those different from themselves must begin with forgiveness, so that they may repent. "Repent and believe," *for "the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* (Mk.1:15). The church, in expanding the community of the forgiven, has not found any without need of forgiveness.<sup>5</sup> Other churches, following the missions of Christ and the Spirit to expand the community of the forgiven, have sought to evangelize those of traditional morality among its neighbors and in its midst. It should be part of the Episcopal church's mission to marry same-sex couples, that is, to discipline them and turn them to the service of the church, that by them redemption may reach further and the marriages of all may be strengthened. We recognize that still other churches consider it

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

their mission to resist same-sex marriages for similar reasons: in order that they might better convert others and turn them to the service of the church, so that by them redemption may reach further and (by a different logic) the marriages of all may be strengthened (BCP, 430).

Mission is to fulfill the promise to Abraham, that all the nations of the earth—the Gentiles, including those Gentiles with whom Paul associated same-sex desire (Rom 1)—should become not curses but blessings to one another (Gen. 18:18, 22:18, 26:4). Christ fulfills that promise by eating and drinking with sinners, refusing to let human differences, even the difference of sinners from God, work as a curse. Rather, Christ takes even the seizure of his body as another occasion to found the feast. God's mission turns curses into blessings, the division among nations into the reconciliation of all peoples. Where a church considers it its mission to resist same-sex marriage in order to witness to Christ's fulfillment of God's mission, they must not let that mission become a curse to others. The church's mission should not lead to imprisonment, persecution, or hatred of sinners; it should lead to eating and drinking with them.

The Spirit leads the church into the future by leading it into mission—which is to say, the Spirit leads the church into God's ways of companionship with the world, and in so doing transforms the church into one of them. God transforms the church by sending it out to cross frontiers, as the Father sent the Son into the far country of creation and death, stretching out on the cross a way for humanity into God. Like eucharist and baptism and mission itself, marriage is a stretching out for communion with another. *Under conditions of sin*, marriage becomes a means of communion that God can stretch out, as on the cross, to expose our faults to heal them. "It is not the well who need the doctor, but the sick" (Mk 2:17).

### *A Confession*

Because those arguing for expansion of marriage have talked often and profoundly of love, we must go first in confessing our sin. While we attended to God's mission among us, we sometimes abandoned our sisters and brothers in the global South, reducing our companionship with them and leaving them uninformed about our changing understanding of same-sex couples. When we did inform them and they remonstrated with us, we went our own way, sometimes responding with tactics rather than with fellowship. Rather than invite the rest of the church into our experience of the Spirit's movement, we have used languages of rights and struggle defensively to isolate our experience from the rest of the church. We have sometimes proceeded as if the rest of the church did not exist, or have regarded it as standing in need of conversion by our lights. We, of all Christians, should know that in mission we go out for companionship with those who are other than ourselves. We have hardly done this with the conservatives in our midst and abroad; too often we have instead taken recourse to law. "To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you" (1 Cor 6:7).

In consequence we too often fear one another within the church. Liberals fear that conservatives will proceed as if same-sex couples do not really exist, or do not need pastoral care. Conservatives fear that liberals will proceed as if the rest of the church did

not exist, or stands in need of conversion. Our similar fears have led to a failure of common life. The Spirit builds *koinonia* by the hospitality we have all refused. In our common failure, we have insulated ourselves, counting purity a thing to be grasped, rather than humbling ourselves, taking the form of a servant. In the transformation of the Spirit, our fears and our failures have brought us together: they bind us into the community of those who seek forgiveness.

Our interpretation of Scripture has suffered from these divisions. We have all favored self-authentication and despised common patterns of discernment. We have all abandoned the discipline of concern for one another. We have failed to practice friendship and hospitality and have not labored for the most charitable interpretations of one another. It is no accident that we now debate marriage. For marriage is an example of the concrete discipline that most of us (liberal and conservative) lack: in marriage we practice common discernment over self-interest. Marriage cultivates concern for one another; it offers life-long hospitality; it enacts love; and it exposes our faults in order to heal them. It is the marital virtues that the church needs, not only with respect to the Bridegroom, but, just now, with respect to one another.

In Acts, the parties agree to maintain hospitality. Jewish Christians may not refuse table-fellowship with Gentile sojourners. Gentiles must refrain from blood, strangled meat, and unchastity (Acts 15:28-29). Here is what we propose: Conservatives maintain table-fellowship. Same-sex couples must marry.

### **“For Better, For Worse”**

#### *The Vows, the Prayers, and the Preface*

“For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.” The marriage vows mark marriage out as an *ascetic discipline*. It is no privilege for spiritual heroes, for the adept or the perfect. To them, Paul commends celibacy (1 Cor 7:9). It is medicine “not for the well but for the sick” (Mk. 2:17). It is for those who would follow Christ to be perfected in weakness for the love of another (2 Cor 12:9). The prayers of the church identify marriage as a discipline for sinners: “Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault” (BCP, 429). The discipline of marriage relies on the difficulty of living with another “in prosperity and adversity” not to avoid but precisely to *expose* our faults—so that they can be healed. Nor does the clause “when they hurt each other” confine itself to minor slights. Since hurt and acknowledgment—sin and confession—are central to Christian growth and sacrament, the next prayer sets their discipline in the theater of the whole fallen world: “Make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this *sinful and broken* world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair” (BCP, 429). These vows mark marriage as an arduous form of training in virtue, by which the promises come true, that God will heal human waywardness and teach us to love (Hos. 14:4; Jer. 3:22). The vows signal no privilege or right; they do not treat sexuality as a need to be satisfied.



The vows offer a means by which God may turn eros into charity (“to love and to cherish”). Not all marriages begin in eros, but it would be an odd account of marriage that reduced its eros to “men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding,” as Cranmer's preface put it (BCP, 1662). Patristic and medieval commentaries on the Song of Songs taught the church to see in eros the hope for agape.<sup>6</sup> The vows do not turn eros into charity by relying on our self-control. That would be a plan designed to fail. Self-control is something you would hardly expect to come from eros. Paul recommends marriage “if they *do not* exercise self-control” (1 Cor 7:9). Rather, marriage so often begins in eros, with its abandonment of self-control, that the rite names not all the things that humans can muster against eros, but many things that tend to defeat it: for worse, for poorer, in sickness, till death. Marriage relies not on self-satisfaction or self-expression, and still less on titanic self-control: it relies instead on self-dispossession for self-donation. It is the daily version of finding one's life by losing it, and it encompasses all the daily practices of lives lived in covenanted closeness: laboring to provide for one another and to support family, organizing a household and its daily table, maintaining and sharing property, caring for another in sickness and finally into death. Undoubtedly the shape of these daily practices has sometimes been distorted by men's controlling power, turning the pattern of mutual self-donation into a female norm of self-denial. The Christian covenant of charity challenges and heals just such distortions of self-giving. If it begins in the self-dispossession of eros, it ends in self-abandonment to God. It turns not our attempts at control but our defeats into victory, on the pattern of Christ's self-giving. It begins in self-donation to the other, and ends in mutual self-donation to God.<sup>7</sup>

The vows of marriage mirror, and in Russian theology derive from, monastic vows.<sup>8</sup> Monks and nuns promise poverty, chastity, and obedience: the married vow “for richer for poorer,” “to have and to hold,” “forsaking all others,” and—for women in older versions of the rite—“to love, cherish, and to obey” (1892). These are matrimonial versions of monastic vows “Perfect spouses are not inferior to monks,” writes John Chrysostom; “they can manifest greater virtues than the monastics.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E.g., Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 13 *In Cantico Cantorum*, PG 44:1048C.

<sup>7</sup> “Self-donation” occupies a prominent place in the nuptial hermeneutics of John Paul II and the eucharistic theology of Bernard Cooke, and has been applied to same-sex unions by David Matzko McCarthy. See John Paul II, “The Man-Person becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love” in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 174-77, and David McCarthy, cited above, pp. 206-213, with references to Cooke.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp. 65-84, abridged and reprinted in *Theology and Sexuality*, pp. 186-91.

<sup>9</sup> *In Epist. ad Ephesios Homilia XX*, PG 62:147; *In illud, propter fornicationes uxorem*, PG 51:209. Quoted in Paul Evdokimov, *Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 164.

The Preface to The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in the Book of Common Prayer puts the discipline of the vows into a christological context and tells us straightforwardly what marriage means. Marriage “signifies the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church” (p. 423). Referring to the miracle of the wine at Cana, the rite looks forward to Christ’s own marital donation of his body at the Last Supper when he says “This is my body, given for you.” As the Wesley hymn explains: "The Church's one foundation/ Is Jesus Christ her Lord/ . . . From heaven he came and sought her/ To be his holy bride;/ With his own blood he bought her,/And for her life he died." A Proper Preface to the Eucharist connects marriage and the eucharist in the same way: "Because in the love of wife and husband, you have given us an image of the heavenly Jerusalem, adorned as a bride for her bridegroom, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who loves her and gave himself for her, that he might make the whole creation new" (BCP, p. 381). Under conditions of the fall, Christ’s marital donation of his body to the church also involves atonement for sin. Invoking the reality of Christ’s marital commitment, the Book of Common Prayer constructs marriage as a means of grace for sinners not just individually but for the whole church. The church's practice of blessing the marriages of couples bears witness not only to the atonement but also to the church's hope for its *own* sanctification. That marriage could work sanctification is hardly evident by nature; it is a reality of faith.

The Book of Common Prayer tells us how to understand the statement that “The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation,” because, it continues, “it signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church.” Marriage is the sign and the atonement is the reality. Marriage is temporary (“till death do us part”); the wedding of the Lamb endures forever (Lk. 20:24-25). This orients earthly marriages to God's salvific purpose. The union of man and woman in creation is typical, in the strict sense that it marks out a *type*, sign or symbol. As the author of Ephesians explains: “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (5:32). The Book of Common Prayer invokes the controlling New Testament interpretation of Genesis. Paul does not associate marriage with procreation or with complementarity, but with typology: with God’s plan to love and save his people, one God, one people. Same- and opposite-sex couples seek to participate in this typology of marriage. It belongs to the church's mission to introduce them into that witness and discipline.

The question of same-sex marriage therefore comes to the church not as an issue of extended rights and privileges, but as a pastoral occasion to proclaim the significance of the gospel for all who marry, because marriage embodies and carries forward the marriage of God and God's people. To deny committed couples marriage deprives them not of a privilege but of a medicine. It deprives them not of a social means of satisfaction but of a saving manner of healing. Those couples who approach the church for marriage-- and those whose priests prompt them to marry—are drawn there by the marriage of Christ and the church, which alone makes it possible for human relationships to become occasions of grace. Couples who delay marriage are like those who previously waited for deathbed baptism; they unaccountably put off the grace by which their lives might be

healed. There is no question of whether the marriage of Christ and the church is available to sinners, but only how it is so.

The church must know how to respond both to couples who seek marriage and those who delay it. Among those who seek marriage are same-sex couples who offer their relationship in witness to and imitation of Christ's love. Among those who delay are same-sex couples waiting for the church to discover and proclaim the significance of its marriage to Christ for their relationships. In both cases, the church faces a test of its understanding of atonement, posed in an immediate pastoral query. How will the church receive the couple that would approach the altar, and how will it suffer the couple that delays?

How the church marries couples shapes its witness to Christ's atonement. Whom the church marries testifies to its understanding of its own sanctification. The church's practice of marrying is an evangelical practice, proclaiming that the love of God for God's people is real, that the atonement is real, that reconciliation is real, that salvation is real. The Spirit calls all Christians to witness to that reality, and the church offers practices for doing so.

Because the love of God for God's people is real, and the declaration "this is my body given for you" is true, the church needs as many witnesses as the Holy Spirit and its mission may draft. Same- and opposite-sex couples who want to marry in the church bear witness to the love of God for God's people and to the power of that love to atone, reconcile, and heal. Not that they can do those things by their human power alone, but the Spirit can attest their witness to the atonement and healing of Christ.

#### *How the Book of Common Prayer follows the New Testament in interpreting Genesis*

The Book of Common Prayer follows the New Testament in interpreting Genesis in light of Christ and the church. While Ephesians has both hierarchical and reciprocal aspects, the Book of Common Prayer chooses to quote a reciprocal passage, and declines to quote the more hierarchical ones. It directs us to the part of Ephesians that interprets Genesis and witnesses to Christ and the church. As is well-known, Genesis offers two accounts of the creation of the human being male and female, one in chapter one and another in chapter two. Neither Jesus nor Paul relates Genesis one to marriage, except where Jesus quotes it against divorce (Mk. 10:6-7), adding a gloss that some same-sex couples have come to quote to the church at large: "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (10:9). When Paul does quote Genesis 1:27, at Galatians 3:28, he blocks one of its interpretations. This is the "be fruitful and multiply" passage that Jesus and Ephesians decline to quote:

Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the

earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen 1:26-31).

Neither Jesus nor Paul quotes "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Some traditional exegesis, noticing this feature of Paul's quotations, argues that Paul associates the passage with what humans share with animals (procreation), rather than with what makes marriage. "The command 'be fruitful and multiply,' addressed alike to the animal world and the human being as 'male and female,' has caused western theologians completely to lose sight of the fundamental fact that the institutional word of marriage, addressed to man as man-woman above the animal plane, does not even mention procreation. It speaks of the 'solitude' of the nuptial communion (Gen. 2:18-24). Likewise, the teaching of the Lord (Mt 19:5; Mk 10:4), and that of St Paul (Eph 5:31)."<sup>10</sup> Certainly, the passage associates the multiplication of procreation with the multiplication of cattle and crops and the command "you shall have them for food." The context here is agriculture.

When Paul does mention this passage, he maintains its wording with care. He preserves it just when parallelism might prompt him to change it. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no 'male and female': for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). The first two pairs have "neither . . . nor" (*ouk . . . oude*); the last pair correctly quotes the Septuagint to read "no 'male and female'" (*ouk . . . kai*). Paul denies that the gender of the believer can hinder Christ. Male and female, Christ can draw them: Christ can be all to all. Christ is the Bridegroom for women and for men; the church is Christ's Bride in its members female and male. Gender does not hinder the Bridegroom or the Bride, the Spirit of fidelity or the Spirit of adoption, for the Spirit can create faithfulness and adopt children even from stones. Precisely because Christ is all--the omega--there can also be "no 'male and female,'" where that means a final, compulsory, exhaustive ending of one in the other, but in the Christ who satisfies the desire of every living thing (Ps 145:16). Christ attracts—or orients—all desire to God. "No 'male and female'" denies, therefore, strong forms of the complementarity theory, according to which a woman would remain incomplete without a man, or a man incomplete without a woman. That theory, taken to its logical conclusion, effectively denies the Christ in whom all things are "summed up" (Eph 1:10).

Thus Paul, when he does quote Genesis 1:27 at Gal 3:28, subordinates it to Christ and blocks the implication that complementarity of "male and female" is exclusive rather than typical. Indeed, ascetic currents in the early church found a stronger reason than exegesis

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<sup>10</sup> Evdokimov, p. 22 runs together with one of his notes; a second note in the same place cites Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, PG 13:1229.

to deny compulsory complementarity or procreation: the examples of Jesus and Paul, who kept mixed company but did not need to be completed either by a spouse of the opposite sex or the procreation of children. If the love of God for God's people founds marriage, then the complementarity of female and male can typify and signify, but not compel or exhaust its meaning.

The tradition that runs through John Chrysostom notes another feature of that passage. The command "be fruitful and multiply," precisely as applied to the man and the woman, does not end the verse but leads to "and fill the earth." The command is not absolute, but contingent. Already at creation, God foresees its end. The earth, Chrysostom explains in the fourth century, is full; its population is enough; the command *has been fulfilled*<sup>11</sup>. God bounds the command by time and sufficiency. But that is not all. Filling the earth is not just quantitative but qualitative, so that the command ends in "dominion." To Paul, therefore, it suggests the qualitative fulfillment of history in the dominion of the Messiah. The command of creation is fulfilled, that is, when the Second Adam fulfills the promise of the first and brings the dominion of God. That is why ascetic innovations in the early church found Paul's example so powerful. Procreation undermined the sense that the command has been fulfilled, the Messiah has come, this world is coming to an end, and human beings may rely on *resurrection* to show God's faithfulness to the continuation of embodied human life. Here is the connection of resurrection and moral order. Because we may trust God, human beings do not need procreation in the same way.<sup>12</sup> Thus Paul promotes celibacy as a witness to the resurrection (1 Cor 7:29). He calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of *adoption* (Rom 8). The New Testament has entered the age in which the sacrament of baptism--which Cyril of Alexandria recognizes as a rite of adoption<sup>13</sup>--qualifies procreation in significant ways. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). The author of John contrasts "children of God" through faith with biological children created through marriage. Thus, the example of Jesus and the teaching of Paul rule out both the cult of fertility and the exclusive version of gender complementarity.

Both Jesus and Ephesians prefer the second account of the creation of human beings. The Book of Common Prayer subjects the interpretation of Genesis 2 to a christological discipline in two ways. First, it reads marriage to signify Christ and the church. Second, it reads it to embody Christ's love of the neighbor as himself. Galatians 3:28 placed Genesis 1:27 under a christological judgment: the oneness of human beings consists not in "male and female," but "in Christ Jesus." Genesis 2:27, on the other hand, receives a christological expansion: "For *this* reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. The mystery is a profound

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<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, "Sermon on Marriage," in *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p. 85.

<sup>12</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily I on Marriage*, in *Theology and Sexuality*, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, PG 33.1081B.

one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself” (Eph 5:32-22).

Why does the author of Ephesians prefer the account in Genesis 2? He tells us that it allows the community to represent Christ and the church. Neither procreationism nor complementarianism is his theme, but witness: witness to the love of God for God’s people. This in itself makes no innovation, but carries forward Jewish exegesis of the Song of Songs as treating the love between God and God’s people. Nor does the witness to the love of God remain distant and otherworldly, but comes right down to earth. Immediately the author draws the conclusion that marriage should teach neighbor-love: “love your wife as you love yourself.” Marriage, therefore, bears witness to both of the great commandments: it signifies the love of God, and it teaches love of neighbor. In turn, how and to whom the church offers marriage shows the great commandments’ scope. Ephesians denies, therefore, that the model of Christ and the church could be the man and the woman standing before the altar in static tableau. Rather, modeling Christ and the church is a *moral* matter; it is an *activity*, a discipline or discipleship; it requires the couple to *practice* the love of the neighbor as oneself (*agapato hos heauton*, Eph 5:32). Not every now and then, but every day; not at a distance, but in the closest quarters. The couple’s path “is narrow, perhaps the most narrow of all, since there are two that walk upon it.”<sup>14</sup>

We may sum up this line of thought like this as follows. Marriage begins in *eros*, and ends in *caritas*. *Eros* refers to the “one flesh” (*sarka mian*) for which one leaves father and mother (Eph 5:31). “*Caritas*” refers to loving the other as one loves oneself (5:32). Marriage thus converts *eros* into the two great commandments about the love of God and neighbor. It testifies to the love of God by signifying Christ and the church. It testifies to the love of neighbor by enacting it toward the spouse. Marriage models Christ and the church, Ephesians suggests, not as a “state” of life, but by *servicing as a school for virtue*. Same-sex couples must also witness to the love of Christ for the church, and they need practice in love of neighbor.

The typology of “Christ and the church” does not reduce to male-female complementarity, even if it uses gendered language. Men have always represented the bride of Christ as members of the church. Women have always represented the priesthood of Christ as believers. More recently, they have represented the priesthood of Christ as ordained. Members of either gender may serve as a sign or represent a “type.” A “type,” in Greek, is a sign of something else. Ephesians is not saying that we should take our understanding of Christ and the church from how our marriages work. It says that we should understand marriage from Christ and the church. Marriage forms do not limit the love of Christ for the church, but that love can give marriage more to mean. The church, traditionally gendered female as Christ’s bride, embraces women and men. “The body of Christ,” while gendered male as a human being, is gendered female as the church. Such shifts remind us why Ephesians calls marriage a “mystery” and treats it as a sign. Types do not limit representation: they open it to God’s work.

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<sup>14</sup> Evdokimov, p. 70.

By interpreting gender christologically, the typology of Ephesians and the Book of Common Prayer - functions to exclude everything that would restrict marriage to opposite-sex couples (its reduction to procreationism or complementarianism), and opens it to everything that would include them. It opens marriage up for sanctification, for the healing of sin, for the donation of the body on the pattern of Christ, for the schooling of love of neighbor, for participation in the atonement that Christ makes for his spouse, for the adoption represented by baptism, the redemption of our bodies, and the wedding of the Lamb. That is why Paul, even if he could not have imagined same-sex marriage, restricts his advice on *who* should marry to the practical: “It is better to marry than to burn” (1 Cor 7:9). He does not advise us to pair up male and female, in order to represent Christ and the church: he advises celibacy and marriage “if your passions are strong” (1 Cor 7:36).

Thus, both same- and opposite-sex marriage may represent the marriage of Christ and the church, because Christ is the spouse of all believers. Men do not represent Christ by maleness alone, nor do women represent the church by femaleness alone. Same-sex marriage witnesses to the reality that a male Christ also saves men and a female church also saves women.

### *Marriage in Christ and Sexual Orientation*

Marriage develops and disciplines the desire of one person for another, which includes and indeed relies on the sexual orientation of human personhood. Christian practices of marrying place the mutual desire of marriage within the desire of God for God's people, and so they interpret sexual orientation within God's desire for humanity.

What is a sexual orientation? It is an orientation of desire. Since Christ “satisfies the desire of every living thing” (Ps 145:16), a sexual orientation, theologically speaking, must be this: a more or less settled tendency by which Christ orients desire toward himself, through the desire for another human being. Alternatively, stated another way--Christ, as God, is nearer to every creature than the creature is to itself. A sexual orientation is a way, a *tropos*, which the creature follows Christ to come as near to another person as a creature can. The orientation of desire to Christ means that sexual orientation is a *moral* matter. All of the married know that they have learned moral virtues—patience or temperance or courage, fidelity, hopefulness, and charity—because of a vulnerability to their spouse that they could not learn from any other person. Eros makes a way to the heart; without the vulnerability it brings, charity grows cold. This is not a lesson of “sexual liberation,” if sexual liberation involves evading commitment and discipline. This is a lesson of the incarnation. The role of yearning in the incarnation and in the marriage that mirrors it cannot be bypassed but must be taken up—in technical language, “assumed”—to provide the energy for moral healing and growth.

What does it mean that human personhood is sexually oriented? Again, the explanation is moral. A sexually oriented person is someone who develops and is morally improved through a relationship with someone of the *opposite* sex, typically but not necessarily the *opposite* sex. Those called to same-sex relationships are those that need them *for their own sanctification*. They need same-sex relationships for their own sanctification because

neither opposite-sex relationships nor celibacy could get deeply enough into their hearts to promote lifelong commitment and growth. “Moral improvement” means growth on the pattern of the incarnation. In addition, that means growth through and not without the creaturely limitations that Christ took on to use for our good: the limits of time and the body. Moral growth takes time. Further, it takes place when we are brought up against the limits and the finitude of our bodies, of our creatureliness. It does not bypass the body. We learn anew with Adam that we are yet creatures, and not gods. Many gay and lesbian people have learned this in trying and failing to “go straight.” Finally, we learn anew with Christ to re-befriend our bodies, to see them as places where Christ can continue in us the project of incarnation in turning desire into charity and even sacrifice.

Complementarity theories of marriage stress “difference.” If difference is about more than body-shape, what differences matter? God intends difference for blessing. Under conditions of sin, we have learned, human beings turn difference to curse. There is enough difference to go around. The question is, *which differences bless?* The differences that lead to moral growth on the pattern of the incarnation, of Christ and the church, are those, as Gregory Nazianzen says, that *turn our limits to our good*.<sup>15</sup> The differences that turn our limits to our good are those that *cause us to need one another*, since love can exist only as relationally possessed. We need each other both because we yearn for one another, and because we challenge one another. It is difference—as need—that excites longing. Same-sex couples are no strangers to that. Rather, same-sex couples are those who encounter yearning and challenge of the deepest, most heart-felt, most life-changing sort from someone of the *apposite*, not the *opposite* sex.

If I am in a same-sex couple, my spouse is the one who most *differs* from me in the morally significant sense: the one who makes me most vulnerable; the one who most escapes my control; the one who brings me to give myself; the one who challenges me; the one who confronts and stands over against me because with that one I disarm and donate myself. That one inspires me and requires that I live out the relation of Christ with his bride: who inspires sacrifice and self-commitment, to whom I undertake the ascetic discipline of “for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better for worse, till death do us part.”

When two women or two men vow lifelong faithfulness to one another in marriage, they order their sexual desires in relationship. It is, indeed, marriage that makes difference, the difference God intended, the difference that blesses, the difference that makes us different, that opens us to challenge and change. The difference that marriage makes is the differentiation of the Spirit, by which the Spirit drives *eros* to sacrifice. The church should call to same-sex marriage those for whom someone of the same sex makes the moral difference. The church should call to same-sex marriage those who need sanctifying. The church should call to same-sex marriage those whose witness she desires to the love of God for the church.

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<sup>15</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 14.7. Maximus the Confessor devotes *Ambiguum* 7 to expanding this idea.



Real desire is not the satisfaction of the ego, but its loss in self-donation. Too many gay and lesbian people have tried opposite-sex marriages to gratify their egos and gain self-control, or to deny themselves. Only in same-sex marriages can they undertake and undergo real self-abandonment and self-donation to the other. Discipline hardly works without longing; all creation waits "with eager longing" (Rom 8:19). With longing Jesus so loves the world, that he gives his life (Jn. 3:16) on the cross. Jesus did not go to the cross by denying what he longed for: Jesus went to the cross by following his desire, because his love was for his bride. Jesus went to the cross by following his yearning, because he yearned for God. That is why marriage imitates the wedding of the Lamb, and initiates desire into charity: it practices the self-giving of a whole life to another followed by the gifts of the Spirit that help unite the spouses to God. Jesus prefers those whose desires run hot (Rev. 3:15) and avoids those whose desires grow cold (Mt 24:12).

No married couple, gay or straight, takes God's grace for granted. Rather, they all pray for grace and mercy. In the marriage liturgy, the celebrant calls on God to "look *mercifully*." The couple comes "*seeking*" God's blessing. The celebrant asks God to *assist* them with grace (BCP, 425). We ask God's assistance more widely. We urge more couples to seek God's blessing and see new signs that God looks mercifully upon those who do. "Marriage does not justify love; it is its grace."<sup>16</sup>

### *Marriage as Medicine*

Under conditions of sin, a community from which one cannot easily escape—especially marriage and monasticism—is not likely to be straightforwardly improving. The community from which one cannot easily escape is morally risky. It tends to expose people at their worst. The hope is that community exposes the worst in people to heal them. To this end, multiple Christian traditions portray Christ as a physician who must probe the wounds. According to the following hymn, the instruments of the examination and cure are those of Christ's own suffering, as he explains it to his mother standing at the foot of the cross:

Be patient a little longer, Mother, and you will see how, like a physician, I . . . reach the place where they lie and I treat their wounds, cutting with the lance their calluses and their scabs. And I take [the] vinegar, I apply it as astringent to the wound, when with the probe of the nails I have investigated the cut, I shall plug it with the cloak. And, with my cross as a splint, I shall make use of it, Mother, so that you may chant with understanding, 'By suffering he has abolished suffering,' my Son and my God.'<sup>17</sup>

The question is, how does the Spirit here extend the medicine of the cross to same-sex couples, as in traditional marriage the Spirit extends it to opposite-sex couples?

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<sup>16</sup> Evdokimov, p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> *On the Lament of the Mother of God* 13, in St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakia on the Life of Christ*, p. 148

### *One God and one people*

Even as a school for virtue, marriage is no final end, but trains us for another reality. "It signifies the union of Christ and his Church." The marriage of Christ and the church is not a metaphor but the *real* marriage, the *mysterion*, which other marriages "signify." The reality that human marriages signify is one God and one people. "What God has joined together, let no one put asunder" (Mk. 10:9) applies to both marriage and the church. That is why "our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee." It is because God loves God's people "that there is such a thing as love and marriage."<sup>18</sup> Because God reaches out to God's people in mission there has come to be love and marriage for couples of the same sex.

### **"To Uphold this Couple in their Marriage"**

#### *The Third Vow*

The marriage vows make marriage an ascetic discipline for sanctification's sake. The marriage preface directs that discipline to the signifying of God's reconciliation. However, there are not only two vows in the marriage rite. There are three. The third vow commits the people witnessing the ceremony to uphold the couple. Marriage is not for the couple alone but also for the gathered church. The marriage preface commissions the couple for *mission*. Their witness to the community, and the community's keeping faith with them signal that marriage itself is no *égoïsme à deux*, but belongs to the work of the Spirit who makes new witnesses.

Traditionalists invite us to consider the risks of revising the tradition to include same-sex couples. Among those risks is jeopardizing the church's mission, especially in contexts where blessing the marriages of same-sex couples would bring scandal or danger. Against those risks, however, others fear confining the tradition by refusing to bear witness to the Spirit of fidelity who extends and celebrates the wedding of the Lamb. Bearing such witness is the office of the Spirit whom we would not want to grieve (Eph 4:30). In such refusal, we cut ourselves off from the Spirit's invitation to the feast and out of the Spirit's movement of adoption. Refusal to bear witness to and keep faith with love refuses to participate in the work of the Spirit. Refusal to celebrate weddings incurs its own moral risk:

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast to his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. . . Then he said to his servants, . . . 'Go therefore

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1958), p. 318.

to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good: so the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (Mt 22:1-3, 9-13).

Parables work on many levels. Jesus’s parable about the guests at the wedding feast has rarely been interpreted at face value. Some of us however are beginning to hear its plain sense: refusing to bear witness to love can also bring scandal and danger. Traditionalists may find the plain sense of the parable applied here in a novel way. Yet that enlargement maintains a deep accord with its traditional sense. The parable has traditionally been used in an anti-Judaic way some now repudiate: God’s servants call Gentiles into the feast of the marriage of the Son and his people, because the invited guests do not come. We repudiate supercessionist rejection of Jews on principle. Indeed, the theme of enlargement (rather than replacement) is more apt. Just as God adds Gentiles to Israel, by adoption (Rom 8) or grafting in excess of nature (*para phusin*, Rom 11:24), so here too God calls the unexpected into the feast. We see this happening: if the church refuses to bear witness that same-sex couples too can represent the wedding of Christ with his people, then the Spirit will expand the church. If the church is visible, not everyone may have eyes to see its full compass. The wedding rite itself requires the congregation to behold and see, to bear witness, to take part in the Spirit’s office of upholding fidelity.

The priest prompts a *third* vow: “Will you do everything in your power to uphold this couple in their marriage,” and the people answer, “We will” (BCP, 425). “The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding *feast*”: the Spirit draws not the couple alone, but all who celebrate with them. One promises; the other returns the promise. That is not all. They do not promise by themselves. A congregation of witnesses promises also. In the third vow, not only the couple but also all the witnesses participate in a relationship of promises. In this third promise, the Spirit draws not only the couple, but also all the witnesses, into a parable of the Trinity, where there is one who gives a promise, one who returns a promise, and one who witnesses, upholds, guarantees, and celebrates the promise.

### *The Third Person*

In this third vow, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of fidelity, the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8)—catches up the whole people into its own proper office of bearing witness to love. In the Spirit of fidelity (8:15), who reunited the Son with the Father to prove that love is stronger than death, the witnesses at a wedding hope to reunite the couple in times of difficulty. In the Spirit of adoption (8:23), who makes additional children for the Father from virgins and stones, the witnesses at a wedding hope the promises will produce a couple and perhaps also adopted or biological children, will with groaning in travail bear them into children of God.

In the Spirit of witness, who caused Jews like Paul and, under his influence, finally Peter to witness to the grafted righteousness of the Gentiles, same-sex weddings especially create witnesses to a grafting of love. Those who make these promises—these third promises, these promises of witness—put on the wedding garment. Those who make these promises at same-sex weddings may put on wedding garments as invited guests, or in place of those who would not come. Those who make these promises—these third promises—strengthen all marriages, not only the one they witness, but also their own, and not only their own, but those of others, because in these promises they uphold fidelity, undertake hospitality, and celebrate love (BCP, 430). This is perhaps the most important reason for same-sex weddings, because those who refuse to witness by refusing to uphold this marriage undermine their own marriage. Those who break this third promise, by their false witness, also break marriage vows while those who practice the third promise strengthen their own. In as much as they promise this to the least of those who marry, they do it for Christ and the church.

There may be reluctant witnesses who may feel driven into the wilderness. This also marks the Spirit's work. Reluctant witnesses are another reason why the priest requires promises from the witnesses present, before the altar, and under God—so that later the couple may hold them accountable, as they may hold the couple accountable, to support the marriage and the promise to witness, guarantee, and celebrate the love of others. “Will you do everything in your power to uphold this couple in their marriage?” Or, as Jesus put it to Peter, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.” For the third vow at a wedding promises to enact discipleship; it anticipates, serves, and celebrates the wedding of the Lamb. The church needs more of them. If invited guests will not come to the wedding, bring them in from the streets.

### *Mission and Paul's Letter to the Romans*

Extending marriage intends to *strengthen* a connection to the love of Christ for the church by extending it precisely according to another missionary goal suggested by Paul: preaching the gospel to the group that Paul associates with same-sex practice, the Gentiles (Rom 1). Both Acts and Romans offer narratives about how the Spirit extends God's community, and therefore God's healing, to those regarded as too unclean to receive it. That is, both speak, of Gentiles. Acts applies to the present case because it shows the Spirit moving the earliest church to readings of Scripture that are not just novel, but apparently opposed to earlier ones by extending full fellowship to Gentiles. Moreover, it does so as the church struggles to make sense of evident holiness where the church did not foresee it. What began as a pastoral question about the conditions of Gentile admission became transformed by the Spirit's movement among the Gentiles into a missional question about the character of the gospel. Just so, many heterosexual persons in the Episcopal Church find that what began as an uncertain matter of conditions of welcome has become transformed by the faithfulness and charity of same-sex couples into a call to witness to the Spirit's mission. Indeed, some of the church's most courageous and cherished missionaries have been gay and lesbian Christians. The Spirit seems to have set a feast; refusing to attend would be ungrateful.

Romans applies even more clearly to the present case for same-sex marriage. In Romans, either Paul or a rival preacher whom he quotes<sup>19</sup> associates same-sex desire with those same Gentiles. It characterizes that desire as illicit, calling it “beyond nature” (1:26; 11:24 uses the same phrase of God). At the same time, it shows the genius of Paul in undermining that very category, the natural, in describing the Spirit’s work. For Paul insists on characterizing the Spirit’s work in terms that extend the biological to include “adoption” (Rom 8:23) and “grafting” (Rom 11:23). In a reversal designed to shock, Paul returns to the very phrase used to castigate the Gentiles’ apparently excessive sexual desire—the phrase “beyond nature”—to describe the action of God in saving them (Rom 11:24). In both cases the word “extension” now seems strictly necessary to describe what the Spirit does, because the church now sees that the Spirit does not leave behind the Jews in extending blessing to the Gentiles. Rather the Spirit (in the metaphors of Romans) “adopts” or “grafts” Gentiles onto the house of Israel. The metaphors of “adoption” and “grafting” are meant to exclude not only the replacement theologies that sprang up nevertheless; they are also meant to exclude the kind of Gentile dominance that would swamp or wash out Jewish identity. “Adoption” and “grafting” mark strikingly para-biological metaphors for the extension of God’s household by love. Similarly, “adoption” and “grafting” make good metaphors for the extension of married households to same-sex couples whom we seek to graft into traditional marriage forms. In order to understand the church’s mission to same-sex couples, we must understand the church’s mission to those with whom Paul (or his rival) associated same-sex desire: the Gentiles.

This procedure enjoys several advantages. It reminds us that the passages in Hebrew Scripture that refer to same-sex sexual activity (Gen 19:5; Lev 18:22 and 20:13 of which the Genesis passage does not refer to desire but to rape) have the same shape as those that Romans treats: they characterize Gentiles. It helps to restore all these passages to the canon of Scripture, from which contemporary embarrassment had banished them. It does that by restoring these passages to their place in a larger and more important topic: the salvation of many nations worked by God.

In Romans, Paul extends the love of Christ for the church by using the phrase *para phusin*, “in excess of nature” (Rom 11:24). Translators often render this phrase as “against nature.”<sup>20</sup> The root meaning of the Greek word *para* is spatial: alongside, as in “parallel.” “Paranormal” and “paradox” connote what comes beside or in addition to the expected, rather than reversing it. No one would hear contrariety in such Greek words as paradigm or paragon, or such biblical words as paraenesis, Paraclete, or parable. Although the preposition functions differently from the compounding form, it is not the same as *anti*. Paul plays on all this by using the preposition and its compounds in the same context. It is just such compounds that abound in Romans 11, forcing a Greek

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<sup>19</sup> For narrower and broader judgments about where the quotation marks would go, see Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) and more recently Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Dale Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995):332-55.

reader to think of the horticultural terms *paraphusas*, *paraphusis*, a graft or insertion. The use of *para phusin* in Romans 11 re-casts and ironizes its use in Romans 1, since both uses concern the characterization of Gentiles.

The Spirit works paraphysically, alongside the incarnation, or by adoption, to make the Gentiles God's "para-people" alongside Israel. Thus, Paul chooses to describe God's extension of the gospel to the Gentiles by the very word with which he or his rival had previously stereotyped them.<sup>21</sup> None of this makes Paul himself pro-gay: but it reads the text of Paul as pro-Gentile. If Paul entertains the cultural stereotype that Gentile sexuality is excessive (Rom 1), he does so to show how God's love of Gentiles is also excessive (Rom 11). Since today almost the whole church is composed of Gentiles, we ignore this at our peril. "How much more quickly," Paul asks in the same verse, "will God cut off you [Gentile, grafted] branches?" We carry forward the love of Christ for the (now mostly Gentile) church in making this extension. We continue Paul's metaphor of grafting the so-called "wild," undomesticated same-sex couples onto the "domestic," household olive tree "in excess of nature."

Romans also reminds the marriage debates that the Spirit of marriage—which is the Spirit that binds Christ and the church—is called "the Spirit of faithfulness" and "the Spirit of adoption" (8:15, 8:23), and not the spirit of procreation or the spirit of complementarity. It is a Spirit that distributes gifts and gathers the diverse. It is a Spirit that reproduces, not itself, but Christ. It is a Spirit that reproduces "not by blood or by the will of the flesh or by the will of man" (John 1:13), but by "grafting" and "adoption." The Spirit who hovers over the waters of creation and the womb can hardly be against procreation—by no means!—but that is not how Paul characterizes it. What the Spirit replicates in Christian marriage is not children *as such*, but children of God, including spouses made into the image of Christ and the church. The marriage of the Spirit produces *Christians*--including, "when it is God's will," children raised "in the knowledge and love of the Lord" (BCP, 423, 429).

### **“For which your Son gave his Life”**

Marriage is one of the chief places in which adults gladly pay one another's debts and substitute for one another. The mystery of Christ and the church includes substitutionary atonement in the context of Christ's marital friendship with humanity. The wedding and the blood of the Lamb are inseparable. *All* Christian marriages, gay and straight, live from the wedding of the Lamb, the Lamb that was slain. The Lamb did not bleed but for the love of the bride, so that even in Anselm, God meets his demand with the gift of the body, and pays his debt with a bodily donation. In fact, Anselm describes himself as by baptism "betrothed to Christ" and therefore "dowered with the Holy Spirit," in the

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<sup>21</sup> Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 108-9.

technical sense of a widow receiving an inalienable share of her dead husband's property.<sup>22</sup> No one has put it more familiarly than Samuel Wesley:

The Church's one foundation/ Is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is his new creation /By water and the word:  
From heaven he came and sought her /To be his holy bride;  
With his own blood he bought her, /And for her life he died.

Moreover, no one has put it more vividly than Jacob of Serugh:

The King's Son made a marriage feast in blood at Golgotha;  
There the daughter of the day was betrothed to him, to be his,  
And the royal ring was beaten out in the nails of his hands;  
With his holy blood was this betrothal made . . .  
he led her into the Garden—the bridal chamber he had prepared for her.<sup>23</sup>  
At what wedding feast apart from this did they break  
the body of the groom for the guests in place of other food?<sup>24</sup>

Marriage participates in the atonement that Jesus made for his spouse. In both cases, a body is given to another. In both cases, the gift begins in desire and ends in charity. Jesus did not die for his spouse because his desire was faint, but because his passion was great. Jesus takes on the body to befriend it, to rescue it from scorn; he gives over the body to befriend others. As Athanasius has him pray to the Father, “As Thou hast given Me to bear this body, grant to them Thy Spirit.”<sup>25</sup> As the atonement does not bypass the body, neither may we. As the atonement uses and elevates the body by giving it as a gift, so must we. Marriage is a signal means of taking part in the atonement through our very bodies, not by expressing or satisfying them, but by giving them. Better—a body's true expression and fulfillment comes only in gift and refusal of this gift risks the refusal of the Spirit. Every Christian must be able to pray to the Father the prayer that Athanasius put on the lips of Christ: “As Thou has given me to bear this body, grant to them Thy Spirit.”

The paradigm for the body in Christianity is Jesus's remark, “This is my body, given for you.”<sup>26</sup> With that, Jesus subverts and redeploys a structure of violent oppression—the

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<sup>22</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Oration II* (formerly *Oration III*) in *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, p. 80, ll. 7f.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob of Serugh, translated as "Jacob of Serugh II," in Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Father on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), p. 287.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on the Veil of Moses*, 11.141-51, trans. in Sebastian Brock, *Studies in Syriac Spirituality*, Syrian Churches Series 13 (Poonah, India: Anita Printers, 1988), p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Orations Against the Arians* III.25.23.

<sup>26</sup> This paragraph is quoted with small changes from Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., “Marriage as an Ascetic Practice.” *INTAMS Review*, *The Journal of the International Academy of Marital Spirituality* 11 (2005): 28-36.

crucifixion—and turns it to a peaceful feast. He reverses the movement of the Fall, which counted divinity a thing to be grasped. Jesus re-befriends the body, and creates the bread of heaven, by counting divinity *not* a thing to be grasped. At the last supper, he performs a deathbed wedding, as if he said: “You cannot violate my body,” he says: “Take it, I give it to you.”<sup>27</sup>

Marriage for same-sex couples helps us recover, not lose, the meaning of the atonement. It helps us recover, not lose, a remedy for sin. It helps us lose, not heterosexual marriage as such, but distortions in which the less powerful suffer at the hands of the more--often women at the hands of men. It also helps us lose, then, distorted meanings of atonement in which the self-abnegation of Christ becomes an image of female subordination and a warrant for patriarchal violence. Marriage for same-sex couples helps us to recover the meaning of atonement in the gift of Christ's body.

Both same and opposite-sex couples may make the mistake of blaming the fall on the body, because that interpretation sees the body as something Christians are saved from, rather than taking the incarnation seriously to see the body as something by which Christians are saved. Rather, Genesis and Philippians agree that the point of the fall is wanting to be like God. Therefore, Genesis 3:5 names the temptation: “you will be like God.” They did not stoop too low, and then fall down: they reached too far up, and fell over. In the Philippians hymn (2:5-6) we read reversal. “Have this in mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (harpagmon)*.” Here the incarnation precisely reverses the fall: Christ undoes Adam's grasping after equality with God. Marriage teaches creatures to “have this in mind”: that they are to participate in Christ's reversal of the fall by intentionally loving each other as Christ loved them. Marriage, among other things, fulfills this command; refusal of marriage to those who appropriately seek it diminishes and detracts from it.

The mystery of Genesis 1 is that I am made in the image of another: not my own. I am destined to find my greatest good in one beyond my control. God is a mystery, as a good too great for me to grasp, and I am a mystery to myself, as having my true good there. Genesis 1 portrays sexuality as a reflection or image of this mystery: “in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26).

Only *after* the first couple grasped after wanting “to be like God” (Gen. 3:5) were “their eyes opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen. 3:7): They did not see that their bodies were bad but that their bodies were *creaturely*. Their bodies told them truth, *they were creatures*, and not God. Their bodies gave their overreach the lie. They felt shame, because they *scorned* the bodies that God created good. Their shame was already an

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<sup>27</sup> For a longer account, see *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, pp. 249-268 and Rogers, “Nature with Water and the Spirit: A Response to Rowan Williams,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 89-100; here, 92-96.



effect of the fall, not recoil from it: they felt shame because they failed to become God, because they were creatures still.<sup>28</sup>

This reading is confirmed by Philippians, because the incarnation reverses it. Christ not only repaired the fall negatively when, unlike Adam, he “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Christ also repaired the fall positively when he “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” Christ repaired the fall by taking on the body, not by scorning it. “*Therefore* God exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” at the *human* name, at the name, Jesus, that Christ received with his body (Phil. 2:7-10).

Why did Jesus not climb down from the cross? - because he held himself accountable to put his body where his love was. In Luke, the last temptation is “if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,” from the temple, the place of sacrifice (4:9). The soldiers' recommendation to Jesus on the cross in Luke to “save yourself” becomes in Matthew a recommendation from passers-by, mockers, and the thieves crucified with him to “let him now come down from the cross . . . let God deliver him” (Mt 27:42-43). Why does Jesus regard climbing down as a temptation? Because he has pledged his love in his body (“this is my body, given for you”) precisely to *these*, to humankind the grasper, the criminal, the thief: and because to climb down from the cross would be to abandon his solidarity with the thief, the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), that other Adam, whom Christ took on a body to befriend.

To put one's body on the line in solidarity with another, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part: that is one place where Christians daily and bodily live out and partake in the atonement by which Christ re-befriends the body and overcomes sin. They practice Christ's solidarity with his bride, the criminal, the thief on the cross. The practice of accountability through the gift of the one's body to another “for better for worse,” and the practice of solidarity with one's body on the line “till death do us part” are *not* things that same-sex couples should be left out of: they are things same-sex couples desperately need and the church desperately needs from them. Traditional Christians have no wish to deprive same-sex couples of their most promising source of help: yet on this account, this is same-sex marriage, because it not only participates in the atonement for sin, but does so by daily practices of accountability far beyond what counseled celibacy can provide. Marriage for same-sex couples allows them to participate in the solidarity of Christ with the thief on the cross whom he did not abandon, but befriended, until death parted and paradise reunited them.

The final reversal of the fall is of course eucharistic, because redemption, like the fall, takes place by eating. Not only do Adam and Eve partake of the fruit of the tree, as the second Adam would later offer the fruit of the vine: they are also commanded “in the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread” (Gen. 3:19). This command becomes the means

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<sup>28</sup> See Sebastian Moore, “The Crisis of an Ethic without Desire,” in *Jesus the Liberator of Desire* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 89-107, reprinted in Rogers, *Theology and Sexuality*, 157-69.

of their redemption when Jesus gives his body as their bread. That is why the marriage rite begins with Cana, which points forward to the Last Supper and the Wedding of the Lamb, and ends with the Eucharist, where “the newly married couple may present the offerings of bread and wine” (BCP, p. 432). Their first married act follows Christ to reverse grasping by offering, and their first common bread replaces Adam’s taking by force with receiving by gift. The gift that they receive—and that they may follow—is Christ’s self-donation, his nuptial commitment to the church, to be where his body is.

### “For their Mutual Joy”

This theology of marriage has so far been very “high.” It invokes a high christology, and it requires high standards. It has interpreted human nature from the standpoint of God’s grace. It has, until now, said little about natural orders and ends, on the view that nature offers no easily known ends, but rather must be interpreted. Christians interpret the patterns of nature by the patterns of grace. This theology of marriage has then interpreted human nature in the practice of marriage within the patterns of God’s dealings with creation. It has then spoken much of sanctification and self-donation, asceticism, training, accountability, and discipline. For fear of giving the wrong impression, it has spoken little of pleasure and joy.

Yet, the marriage rite expects joy from those united together, as the fulfillment of their nature as human creatures. “The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy” (BCP, 423). Indeed, this end of marriage comes *before* the mutual donation, “for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity.” “Joy” precedes “gift” as justification before sanctification, as prevenient grace. For what can prompt the gift of self? Overwhelming grace that carries and transports: Augustine calls it *delectatio victrix*, delight that wins the victory, and he analyzes it in his letter to Simplicianus. What do you have, Augustine asks, that you did not first receive? One first receives, he answers, by God’s prevenient moving of the heart, moving it most interiorly, more intimately than it moves itself, a moving Augustine calls “delight.” Augustine was speaking of conversion, but he might have been speaking of marriage, when he wrote: “Who can embrace wholeheartedly what gives him no delight? But who can determine for himself that what will delight him should come his way, and, when it comes, that it should, in fact, delight him?”<sup>29</sup> “Love, like martyrdom, cannot be imposed.”<sup>30</sup>

Peter Brown paraphrases Augustine’s claim in *Ad Simplicianum* like this: “Delight is the only possible source of action, nothing else can move the will. Therefore, a man can act only if he can mobilize his feelings, only if he is ‘affected’ by an object of delight.”<sup>31</sup> This delight both gives a vision of the whole—what life with this one (bride or

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<sup>29</sup> *Ad Simplicianum* I.ii.21.

<sup>30</sup> Evdokimov, p. 188.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 154-55, citing *Ad Simplicianum* I.ii.13.

Bride, bridegroom or Bridegroom) might be like, and a foretaste of charity, as *eros* (for a time) gives what charity demands.

In the exegesis of the Song of Songs, therefore, delight does not reduce to its fleeting character, as if its fulfillment should blink in and out of sight: rather its yearning remains constant when its vision departs. “Let me leave them outside, breathing into the dust, and filling their eyes with earth, and let me enter into my chamber and sing my songs of love to Thee, groaning with inexpressible groaning in my distant wandering, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart stretching upwards in longing for it: Jerusalem my Fatherland, Jerusalem who is my mother . . . .”<sup>32</sup>

This is so because in human love, if it is really love, “it is the image of God that delights us.”<sup>33</sup> The union of the spouses “is intended by God for their mutual joy”—and can hardly be otherwise, if the end of the human being is “in the joy of fully knowing and loving God and each other.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, “[t]he life of the Christian community has as its rationale—if not invariably its practical reality—the task of teaching us so to order our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as the occasion of joy.”<sup>35</sup> This then is no selfish joy. The spouse learns joy only by teaching the *other* that *he* or *she* is the occasion of joy. And this is not individual or even couple-centered joy. This is among the ways that the church teaches her members that God loves them for Christ's sake in the Spirit. That is why the marriage rite teaches that the union of the spouses—even sinners--“is intended by God for their mutual joy.” If even sinners may rejoice that heaven is at hand, then why not? If even marital discipline trains for the kingdom, how then could it be otherwise? Although we have stressed marriage as a risky and difficult form of training in virtue, the liturgy presents it to us as a celebration, intended for joy—because without joy it could not prefigure the wedding of the Lamb. The wedding feast, like the Sabbath, is a day of the Lord: Let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps 118:24; Rev. 19:7).

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<sup>32</sup> *Confessions* XII.xvi.23.

<sup>33</sup> Evdokimov, p. 172.

<sup>34</sup> *Catechism*, BCP, p. 862.

<sup>35</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 312.

## The Traditionalist Response

The conversation between the traditional and liberal teams on this panel has been charitable and constructive, and we affirm the sincere desire of our counterparts to be faithful and to build up the Church. At the same time, we find their argument confused and their exegesis mistaken, and we worry that the revision they advocate would be harmful to the life of the Church. This is important to point out, for we readily acknowledge the quasi-homiletical eloquence of their paper, into which the reader may be caught up. There are extended sections of spiritual explication of the meaning of marriage, which we found moving. The problem is that those sections do not actually bear on the question we have been commissioned to reflect upon, whether or not same-sex couples ought to be married. It is on the passages that deal with the question at hand, especially as they offer theological argumentation and scriptural interpretation, that we will focus our attention.

Our counterparts are offering what they themselves understand to be a surprising and “transgressive” argument. To this end there are places where words are used in highly unusual, even contrarian ways: passages in praise of celibacy now serve to undermine the norm of heterosexual monogamy, all in the service of homosexual marriages, which are described as “ascetical.” (One can only imagine how amazed the Patristic and Orthodox authors cited would be to read the use to which their ideas are being put). We will show how key biblical passages are made to stand on their heads; for example, Ephesians 5, with its explicit reference to male/female complementarity, is taken to say the opposite. These swerves in the argument slide by quickly, and our task will be to point out such detours. Our advice to readers is to remain focused on the question at hand.

Note well what *is not* in their argument, namely any treatment of the question of scientific evidence about homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> This is odd for several reasons: 1) its treatment was part of our mandate, and 2) it features prominently in popular arguments in favor of

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<sup>1</sup> Though they avoided the scientific discussion mandated for us in this project in their main document, the liberal side does wade into this debate in their response. At the outset, they acknowledge that the question of the etiology of homosexual orientation is a murky and controverted one. They then assert, “sexual orientation begins in the womb...” But how could this possibly be correct, since one side of the argument in the controverted debate about the causes of orientation emphasizes factors of human environment, of “nurture”? The liberal claim then expands exponentially: it is a “natural aptitude,” it is “nature” in a theological sense (in distinction from grace, and so as in itself a gift of creation), it is even a “christological condition...[directing] our desire godward...” indeed a gift of the Spirit hovering over “the waters of womb.” These huge claims stand in sharp tension with the starting point of scientific agnosticism; they are heavily freighted with debatable assumptions that are the stuff of the contention that runs throughout this whole debate (i.e., effect of the fall or gift of creation). Such bald assertions cannot stand up. For example, advocates of same-sex marriage acknowledge that for at least a few persons a significant cause of same-sex attraction may be abuse - how can this fit with this picture of divine prevenient orientation. Likewise all involved in this debate, liberal and traditionalist, agree that some people are oriented in a pernicious way, e.g. with sexual attraction to minors, whether of the same or the opposite sex. Surely, the orientation-granting Spirit did not hover over the waters of their mothers’ wombs.

the blessing of same sex relations. We would hazard the guess that the data in its ambiguity and inconclusiveness were not helpful to their argument.

### **What is the core argument?**

It is always interesting when authors tell us what they are not saying at the outset. When our counterparts tell us that they are not offering an argument based on experience, spiritual enthusiasm, and cultural trend, they “doth protest too much,” for that is just what they in fact do present. Theirs is a pneumatic argument, an intuition of what they believe the Holy Spirit is doing in the world, namely the confirmation of the affirmation of gay unions, first in society and now in the Church: they say, “the Spirit has contrived with social change.” They identify this movement as part of the *missio Dei*, the work of the triune God reaching out to the world through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. Who could be against that?

To see the problem in this apple-pie-and-motherhood argument, a word of historical perspective from the modern theology of mission (missiology) is helpful. The origins of the idea of the *missio Dei* are in the period after World War II, when figures such as Lesslie Newbigin and the German missiologist Georg Vicedom sought to emphasize the triune God’s sovereign work as opposed to our own human plans and efforts. They worried that their contemporaries’ “God was too small,” and this idea would show His work in the whole world to be bigger. But the problem is to read what God’s work is off the secular record of worldly events and movements alone. With the emergence of a more secularized missiology in the 1960s, it soon became apparent that the *missio Dei* bore for each writer a striking resemblance to his or her own agenda for social change in the world.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the danger is that, under the guise of mission, and marinated in a rich broth of Trinitarian language, the idea becomes an occasion for the social agenda items their advocates already espouse. Far from being a means of turning our attention to God, it becomes a cover for the same old fixation on our own interests.

This is exactly what is going on in this argument. Our counterparts tell us that what God is doing in the world at present is the affirmation of same-sex couples in society and the Church (= *missio Dei*). How do we know this to be true? The Spirit says so. How have they ascertained this? It is self-evident from their experience of these couples, from the trends of liberation in our culture, etc., at least to those who agree. This self-evidence is a kind of immediate intuition from looking at the world. This brings us to the next crucial stage in the argument: “the Scripture demands to be read in accordance with the *missio Dei*.” So, passages that do not move in that direction can be ignored or can undergo a swerve in interpretation. Therefore, the pneumatic train of thought goes like this:

Cultural intuition -> Spirit -> *missio* -> norm for reading Scripture -> rereadings in conformity to the *missio*

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<sup>2</sup> The classic work on this is H. H. Rosin, *‘Missio Dei’: an Examination of the Origins, Contents, and Functions of the Term in Protestant Missiological Discussion*, (Brill: Leiden, 1972). Lesslie Newbigin talks about his worries about the secularized direction the idea took, especially in the writings of Hans Hoekendijk, in his autobiography *Unfinished Agenda*, (London: SPCK, 1985).

Note what a radical change in biblical exegesis this will bring about. We are warned against readings that would constrain the work of the Spirit in the *missio Dei*. Surely, attention to what the words actually say should constrain readings; otherwise, it is hard to say that it is reading we are doing at all. An important part of the Scripture serving as a canonical authority for the Church is that it can guide, critique, and indeed constrain the judgments and decisions of the Church. This power to address the Church is clearest in cases of “repugnance” (see Article 20 of the 39 Articles), where a matter in question stands in direct contradiction to the plain sense of a passage, interpreted in keeping with the whole witness of Scripture. We will show that such is the case before us. It is precisely at this point that the debate over homosexual behavior, while it may not be (to use the unhelpful language of the Righter trial) “core doctrine,” does become a prime occasion for a debate over a doctrinal issue of great importance, namely the authority of Scripture itself.

There is, of course, an irony in the abstract use of God’s mission to the Gentiles, since it is in the service of a cause which continues to tear at the communion we have as Anglicans from all the nations of the earth. The liberal argument offers confession of carelessness on this score and calls for greater neighborliness, but there is no indication of a willingness seriously to take counsel with our fellow nations in the communion or to have our behavior constrained by their admonitions. They admit that they have “despised common patterns of discernment,” but counsel continuing in the same vein in spite of this fact. The idea that Gentiles from different vantage points can see for one another things one cannot see for oneself, is absent; we are sorry, and then we do what we want to do. The real catholicity of fellowship, born of the *missio Dei ad gentes*, is marred.

Let us return for a moment to the core logic itself, for understanding it helps to answer an important question about the liberal case. This is a seeming tension in their document. They tell us that only now, in light of the Spirit’s movement in the lives of same-sex couples, can the plain sense of the passages in question be understood. However, at one point, they seem to acknowledge that Paul meant what we traditionals are saying, except that the whole “male-female symbol system,” of which these views are a part, is problematic and must be reworked. This latter, more radical tack reminds us of an interpreter like Walter Wink,<sup>3</sup> who more straightforwardly acknowledges that the Bible is on this subject uniformly negative, and goes on to claim that here the Bible is wrong. We are told that, where it is wrong, we need to move in the direction of greater progress and liberation. While there is a hermeneutical gap within the liberal argument itself between these two views, it provokes only a seeming tension, since it makes no theological difference.<sup>4</sup> For both subthemes in the liberal argument evince a similar underlying logic,

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<sup>3</sup> See his review in *Christian Century*, June 5-12, 2002, pg. 33.

<sup>4</sup> This difference of opinion within the liberal side itself, between the “new plain sense” claiming better to understand Biblical texts, and a critique of those texts as patriarchal, may be found in the liberal response itself. The latter, more liberationist view asserts itself when the liberal response tells us that patterns of domination on which the Biblical texts are based have been replaced by emerging model based on “egalitarianism, mutuality, and democracy.” (19<sup>th</sup> century liberal Protestantism lives!) We too are all for democracy as a political system, but making such markers of Western cultural progress the norm for judging Scripture is another matter.

which is typical of method in modern theological liberalism: a general theme derived from the culture at large comes to serve as a norm for the reading of Scripture. In both cases, the experience of same-sex couples, growing out of a political and social movement, generates the norm, in the later case more directly, in the former case in a more roundabout way via the invocation of *missio*.

If God has acted, as it is suggested in the *missio Dei* argument of the liberals, who are we to contend with God? For its advocates, the matter is already settled. So they naturally feel they must proceed, without waiting on more debate and regardless of consequences. This casts the context of dialogue in which we participate in a clearer light. We have addressed the question whether we ought to see this question as a “Church-dividing issue.” Such an issue is properly understood as one that follows so directly from the very nature of the Gospel that faithfulness requires action, come what may.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the liberals see this issue, for they believe they are only following what the Holy Spirit has already done. They proclaim confidently that this is already the “American mission’ to the world. In just this way, the liberal side in the Episcopal Church, as they move forward unilaterally in diocese after diocese without regard to the effects on the Communion, are treating this issue as a “Church dividing issue.” As an aside, we may note the odd and awkward position this places us who advocate the traditional view on this subcommittee. It is more normal to consider arguments pro and con before the decision has been made!<sup>6</sup>

### **Misreading Scripture**

In our main document, we have already treated the key passages, and we will not rehearse their arguments here. We recognize that there can be debate over the meaning of passages, and that passages can have multiple senses. However, this does not mean one can overlook or overturn what passages actually say, and such is the treatment key passages receive in the liberal argument. We can register these problems succinctly.

- a) Acts 15 is foundational to the pneumatic argument. As the early church was opened to Gentile believers, so we now must open ourselves to same-sex marriages. But this swerves aside from some obvious facts: i) the inclusion of the Gentiles was the fulfillment of prophetic hopes (see for example Isaiah 2:2-4), while there is no such warranted Old Testament hope in the case of homosexual relations ii) the opening to the Gentiles followed the decisive act of Christ at the turning of the ages. In contrast to them, we should not presume ourselves apostles at a new turning of the ages iii) the Jerusalem Council specifically forbids *porneia*, that is, “sexual immortality.”

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<sup>5</sup> In Reformation theology the technical term is the *status confessionis*, “the stand for witnessing.”

<sup>6</sup> There is a potentially worrisome side to the pneumatic argument for the one who refuses to see what is claimed to be the work of the Spirit. How might Matthew 22:1-3, 9-13 come to be interpreted by the church about its conservative minority?

- b) Mark 10. Here Jesus tells us of the nature of marriage, between a man and a woman, as ordained by God “from the foundation of the world.” In so doing, he quotes both Genesis 1 and 2. Yet, inexplicably, the liberal side continues to insist that Jesus avoided citing the former, and they find in this imagined avoidance evidence against what they call “complementarianism.” This is simply inaccurate.
- c) Galatians 3:28 The liberals read Paul’s statement that there is no more “male and female” in Christ as a warrant for same-sex marriages. However, this ignores the context of the passage, and the rest of the Pauline witness, and so amounts to proof-texting. Paul is, quite simply, not talking about marriage. While in Judaism, only the free, Jewish male could contribute to *minyan* in the synagogue, now all stand together and equally in prayer in the *ekklesia*. Indeed, when it comes to salvation, there is no difference between male and female. Neither Paul nor we would suggest anything different, and so the use of this passage in a discussion of marriage amounts to presenting a straw man.
- d) Romans 1 and 11. As to the former, the liberal argument ignores what the passage in question actually says. They focus on the criticism of the Gentiles as being oversexed, but they ignore that fact that the passage refers directly to the sameness of same-sex relations, including lesbian relation (so excluding the suggestion that Paul had only pederasty in view). The argument then proceeds to claim that the references to *para phusin* in Romans 1:26 and in 11:24 should be understood in the same way, as meaning “beyond nature.” The claim is that taken together they amount to God’s grafting in the homosexual behavior discussed in chapter 1. This is clever but surely wrong. First, the tones and directions of the passages are starkly different. Secondly, the inclusion of the Gentiles does not mean the acceptance of all they do, especially that behavior he singles out as emblematic of their fallenness.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, a phrase does not mean the same thing everywhere it is used, for meaning must take account of use and context. In fact, the Greek lexicon will confirm that the preposition *para* can mean a number of things, among them “beyond” and “against.”
- e) Ephesians 5. The liberal argument sees this passage as part of what they call the “participatory” theme in Ephesians in contrast to its hierarchical sections, and as such, they see it as a witness against gender complementarity. Given that the passage actually quotes Genesis 2 on the joining of man and woman, this reading simply contradicts what the passage actually says. Furthermore, it is ironic to deploy this passage against the procreative end of marriage, since it is part of the point of the type. One reason it serves as a “great mystery” is that the life-giving relationship of man and woman is a sign of the spiritually life-giving relationship of Christ and the Church. Furthermore, it should be noted that the verses that immediately follow in chapter 6 have to do with children. The misreading of this passage points to a more pervasive problem in the liberal side’s hermeneutics. They offer an account of typology that claims that only the antitype (the thing to which the type refers) bestows meaning, “back” as it were, on the type itself. In

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<sup>7</sup> I Cor 6:11: “such were some of you...”



other words, it is only Christ and the Church that tell us how to understand male and female in marriage (in this case the type). To be sure, the type does not exhaust what one might know of the antitype. Surely male and female in marriage, a thing we do know something of, does tell us something about Christ and the Church. That is, after all, the point of an analogy. The liberal reading of the typology, in which the meaning is “opened up” without restraint, conforms to their core wish not to confine their understanding of the *missio*.

### **A Consequence of great consequence**

The reader may tire of all this exegetical debate, and may wonder what is really at stake; the answer is “a great deal.” The liberal argument would at the outset have the reader understand their proposal as a modest addition to the traditional understanding of marriage, which remains intact. But as the case continues, we see that a major reinterpretation is envisioned.<sup>8</sup> The marital purpose of procreation is fine for those so inclined, but we may note the subtle shift from “purpose” as a goal given by God in creation, to “purpose” as an option that a human will might choose. Furthermore, we can cite a number of passages in their argument where procreation stands in contrast to the spiritual ends of marriage (consider for example, “what the Spirit replicates in Christian marriage is not children as such, but children of God...”) They cite affirmatively the opinion that procreation as an end of marriage has been demoted since the advent of Christ. (This strange combination of a post-procreative dispensation and a sex-positive “asceticism” might best be named “Shakerism with benefits.”) Procreation is identified as “what the human being shares with the animals,” as if this were a slight on us; for all the talk of bodiliness the argument here has a gnostic tinge. We do indeed share our bodiliness with the animals; here the biologist has something to say to the theologian. What is at stake here is the very nexus of creation and redemption, of which we spoke in our paper. Why should we assume that in matters such as ecology we do well to think and act “with the grain of creation,” but when it comes to the doctrine of the human person, and our sexuality, we ought not to think and act so? Something theologically basic is at stake here which would have major consequences if this anti-breeding drift were to affect our understanding of the human person and of society. To cite but one implication, denigration of procreation leads to the “devaluing [of]...the bearing and raising of

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<sup>8</sup> At this point, we must dissent from the claim of the liberal side that they and we have no disagreement over the “significance of marriage.” While we applaud their highlighting of a common commitment to charity in this debate, we believe that the liberal transformation of the traditional end of procreation into a personal choice, and the relegation of childbearing to the old eon, amount to a seismic shift in the significance of marriage. Their desire to blunt the sharpness of their argument is odd, given their willingness to follow its radical nature through much of our dialogue. Our disagreement can and should be charitable: in this vein, we welcome their rejection of litigation and happily and enthusiastically endorse rejection of all coercion and prejudice against gay people. At the same time we honor one another more if we take seriously the fact that we have before us a real disagreement on which a great deal rides. To claim that it amounts to a celebratory diversity following from the very persons of the Trinity resonates rhetorically, but hides the fact that discernment means deciding and deciding has consequences. (In fact the advocates of same-sex marriage know this, driving determinedly toward implementation of the revision. In this light, claims that the opposing sides are but complementary perspectives in the spirit of F.D. Maurice seems ironic.

children.”<sup>9</sup> This needs, for the sake of transparency and candor, to be made clear to the Episcopal faithful in the pews--one wonders what their reception of this dimension of the new teaching might be.<sup>10</sup>

### **Unmoored, and drifting where?**

The liberal argument claims for itself boldness, and so we need to track its trajectory, since some of its implications will be different from what we might assume. One such example is the idea of monogamy inherited from the tradition, which turns out to be a vestige, in its two-ness, of the biological fact of conception, and so tied implicitly to the now demoted procreation. If marriage is now really about mutuality and self-donation, would there not be all the more of these in polyamory?

Equally worrisome is the implication of the argument’s view of sexual expression per se. As sexual beings, we inherently seek fulfillment according to our orientation.<sup>11</sup> We are told that only such expression can “get deeply enough into their hearts to promote lifelong commitment and growth,” which has a strange ring given the praise offered earlier in the argument to celibacy. The imperative of sexual self-expression is connected to what is called “befriending the body” (a phrase with a distinct popular psychological ring). To refuse to befriend the body is to deny one’s creatureliness and so to fall into sin. But even this is not all: the warrant for this befriending, we are told, is the incarnation of the Son Himself. Sanctification is understood as the extension of the “project of incarnation” whereby God is transforming *eros* into agape through marriages. Our worry here has to do, not with the kind of rhetoric that is employed, but with the impression that it leaves. First, it seems to expand the role of marriage drastically; at times it sounds as if marriage is simply how Christ makes atonement available to us, so that those who are unmarried are somehow left out (“refusal of this gift [marriage] risks refusal of the Spirit.” What happened to sheer faith? Second, when we hear that desire is necessary “to provide the energy for moral healing and growth,” we worry about a rhetoric that too blithely praises *eros* per se; our counterparts would agree that there is *eros* galore turned toward degrading, violent, and abusive purposes. Talk of *eros* must always have the doctrine of original sin near at hand. Third, we worry about a tendency to eroticize even our talk of God himself. While the tradition has been willing to speak this way in a mystical sense, the concept of the divine Eros has also posed problems for Christian self-

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<sup>9</sup> Doug Farrow, “Beyond Nature, Short of Grace,” *IJST*, vol. 5/3, p. 281

<sup>10</sup> The expansionist response cites a threefold typology of Evdokimov’s for the ends of marriage: procreation (catholic), restraint of lust (protestant), and sanctification (orthodox). Precisely this kind of isolation of one end from another should be avoided. Surely, *Genesis 2*, *I Corinthians 7*, and *Ephesians 5* are the common inheritance of the whole Church.

<sup>11</sup> The treatment of orientation as a given and, as such, our nature ready to be taken up by grace, is given no backing in a treatment of the scientific evidence. In addition, we are left wondering about orientations of kinds that both teams would find pernicious. If they are settled do they require fulfillment, and if not, then “settledness” is not enough of a guide.

understanding in the tradition, even without being connected to advocacy of sexual activity itself, as it is here.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

We do well to note several, more general features of the argument as a whole. First, it is an energetic case for same-sex marriage. There is no interest here in evasive halfway blessings of unions. The real question at hand is the nature of marriage, and that is what they would debate. On this, they should be praised for their clarity and candor.

Second, this is not the proposal of some small addition to an otherwise stable institution. The problematic “male-female symbol system” requires a radical change. The inherited notion was a “warrant for patriarchal violence.” Marriage itself is now to be understood, for all, to be based on mutuality and self-giving regardless of gender. If Tom happens to choose Peggy, but it could have been Bob--it is just a matter of choice. To reiterate, candor requires that the Episcopal Church make it clear that it understands all marriages in this radically new way.

Third, the argument offered by the liberal side is, whatever its strengths may or may not be, highly idiosyncratic. In our view it is not an argument that would be recognizable or acceptable to most Christian traditions, or most Christians in the world. In other words, at the very least a long, long road would lie ahead of such an argument until one could say that it has been received by the faithful. In ordinary circumstances, this would delay implementation of its recommendations, but as we have observed, when it comes to discernment and doctrine, the Episcopal Church’s *modus operandi* is far from ordinary. For all the quoting of Orthodox theologians, this argument is complicit in a change that could well spell the end of significant ecumenical relations for the Episcopal Church.

At the outset of our dialogue, the traditionalists offered as a key diagnostic issue, the following question: are same-sex relations an effect of the fall or a blessing of creation? If one opted for the former, one might still have a debate about how best to respond pastorally. But the assumption throughout their argument is for the latter, and when one chooses that road, and then one has no choice but to seek to undo the traditional account of the ordering of the sexes in creation itself, of complementarity, procreation, and the raising of children. A close reading of this case shows what it looks like to follow that road out consistently. Has the church truly measured the tower about making such a revised account normative, about teaching it in confirmation classes and pre-marital classes? To suppose that this case is consistent with a moderate accommodation out of

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<sup>12</sup> Again, a comment by Doug Farrow, *op.cit.* in which he quotes Rogers’ book *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, is apropos: “...`God desires to enter into human bodies to be desired bodily by them.’ Eros is the real mediator here, not Jesus Christ. That is why withholding the sacrament of marriage is, for Rogers, tantamount to excommunication. Sex prefigures the Eucharist...to close that sacrament to homosexuals...is to consign them to a `destiny toward nothing.’ It is an offense not only against their humanity, but God, for `it gives God nothing by which to redeem them,’” (p. 279).

pastoral concern with the traditional doctrine of marriage intact, as many Episcopalians, sensitive to the culture, may wish to do, simply does not follow from a close reading of this case. To follow this path promises something more challenging.

In our dialogue, we have sought candor; let candor be the watchword here at the end of our remarks. We must know ourselves to be part of our modern Western culture that valorizes autonomy and self-creation; it is not hard to see how we are readily and often tempted. Something there is in us moderns that does not love a constraint, which wants it down, for it seems to us arbitrary, “heteronomous” (to use Tillich’s term). We would define and control the genetics of our children, the terms of our dying, even the nature of marriage and its relation to the procreation of a new generation. Making marriage itself into an instrument of our own self-definition is then a case in point of something more pervasive. We would err if we left the impression that this fault lies especially with the advocates of same-sex marriage. Let the last word go to Paul in the *locus classicus* of Romans 1. There he insists that homosexual relations are but a vivid example of the fallenness to be found in us all. We all partake in some way in the willfulness of our age. The ubiquity of the deeper problem cannot, however, deflect us from the task, to which we are here called: to speak up when something as basic as marriage is redefined to our culture’s better liking, and when our Christian colleagues would hear peace, peace, even if it means disregarding the very words of Scripture itself.

## **The Liberal Response**

We first want to thank our colleagues for their paper, “Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: a View from the Traditionalists” which sets out their position clearly and describes with care and respect a number of different positions. Our discussions together in the preparation of these papers have been difficult, at times emotional and passionate, and mutual trust has been hard won. Our arguments have made clear to each of us the theological, political, and personal stakes for the church’s witness to marriage. We have all shared concerns that our work together might be misunderstood, manipulated, or enlisted by church parties in ways that would contravene our purposes in working together. We are then grateful to the traditionalist panel for undertaking honest inquiry into the question of same-sex marriage in the midst of such a fraught context.

We offer this response so that readers may know how we understand the significance of our disagreements over marriage, to explain why the arguments proceed differently, and to point out some implications. Church parties will quickly draw their own implications so we wish here to be forthright about one: the church can include both of these witnesses to marriage. In our judgment, neither paper scandalizes the faith or ruptures the church. On the contrary, both papers describe faithful patterns of marriage that the church needs for its witness to the truth. Where we disagree, it is over patterns of holiness and pastoral practice—not over the dignity of all persons, the significance of marriage, or the truthfulness of the gospel.

### **The Divide**

Readers will observe that the traditionalist and expansionist arguments proceed almost along parallel tracks, so that they rarely come into direct conflict. This is because the papers use different methods to different purposes. The conservative paper argues that accepting same-sex marriage contradicts moral teachings of Scripture and the guidance of reason by natural law. It therefore defends readings of Scripture that support traditional heterosexual marriage, in part by guarding against comparisons with previous social questions about slavery and the roles of women. It supports those readings with natural law principles of sexual complementarity and procreative purpose in marriage. Our argument, on the other hand, does not reason from specific social teachings but from the moral patterns of Scripture. We do not, then, attempt to defeat biblical suspicions of various sexual relations, but rather to show how God uses marital faithfulness to heal and perfect sinners. Our argument does not seek to overturn biblical accounts of marriage and sexual morality; on the contrary, it upholds and deepens their theological meaning. We support our reading of marriage not by appealing to natural rights or to inclusive justice, but by showing how same-sex marriage fits within the scriptural liturgy and orthodox theology of the church.

Both papers demonstrate the burden that an expansion of marriage must bear within the Anglican Communion. The traditionalist paper points to the majority sentiment of the Communion, which has many members suspicious of North American innovations and western sexual culture. Our argument acknowledges that burden by demonstrating how an innovative witness to marriage is part of the Episcopal Church’s mission within its

culture and explaining how missional innovation sits within a New Testament pattern of church unity and discernment.

Because of our sense of the church's mission, we argue for blessing same-sex marriages, not for blessing civil unions or same-sex partnerships. While some civic and legal strategies reserve the word "marriage" for relationships between male and female, and use another term such as "union" for relationships between two women or two men, the distinction does not make sense within the life of the church. There, marriage is a discipline, a means of grace, and a type of the relationship of Christ with the Church. Our argument therefore eliminates the option of "half way houses" and compromises ("Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology." We agree with the traditionalist paper and Archbishop Williams that public blessing of same-sex unions would function as Christian marrying, and we acknowledge with them that sentiment in the Communion stands against that.

We do not then argue for same-sex marriage lightly or in disregard of the Communion. We do so for the sake of the mission of our church within the Communion, as a way of giving our testimony to the work of the Spirit among us. Our position seems pressed upon us by the witness of same-sex couples, the pastoral practice of the church, and the sacrament of marriage. There is a wealth of theological, ethical, and hermeneutical work done in support of including sexual minorities in the life and leadership of the church, and of recognizing faithful same-sex partnerships as legitimate ways of living a Christian life. For the sake of mutual understanding and responsibility, our argument proceeds from the church's liturgical tradition and practices of moral formation. For we want our companions in mission to hear us say this: expanding our blessings of marriage to include partners of the same sex does not undermine marriage; it upholds and strengthens it.

An important role for traditionalists in the Episcopal Church, their paper notes, is to continue taking part in the debates of the Communion, for they are well placed to serve as an interpreter of each side to the other. They have improved our understanding of opposing views from other parts of the Communion. We hope that by understanding our missiological appraisal of social changes in sexual attitudes and marital practices in western societies, they can help interpret the situation of expansionists in the Episcopal Church to the rest of the Anglican Communion. The purpose of our proposal is not to defeat a traditionalist position, but to provide a catechesis of marriage for the church within its context.

## **Scripture**

The two papers take different approaches to Scripture, but neither undermines its authority for Christian life. They do not differ as enlightened opposed to fundamentalist, or modern versus pre-modern. The traditionalist paper worries that its argument will be dismissed as fundamentalist, but we do not make that charge. Nor do we denigrate pre-modern models of hermeneutics. On the contrary, we point to instances of Scripture reading Scripture (e.g., Paul quoting Genesis) and of the liturgy reading Scripture. So we read with the earliest church, with the Book of Common Prayer, and with patristic and medieval interpreters.

We also read with an expanded community of readers, including many whom the church has not previously recognized and some whom the biblical texts do not address as subjects. In the authorial perspective of some biblical texts, women, wives, slaves, Gentiles, and sexual minorities are subordinated as persons and silenced as mutual interpreters of God's revelation. The expanded readership of the Christian church now questions these attitudes and the social presuppositions on which they were based. We read scriptural texts about marriage in a culture and world of ideas where the model of authority of husband over wife, master over slave, and parent over child has been substantially revised in the direction of egalitarianism, mutuality, and democracy. We welcome this development as positive, and related to Christian social witness. Of course, modern notions of freedom, equality, and autonomy have their corruptions and abuses, and of course, these ideas have been negotiated within a wider culture, but their impulses and logic have come in significant measure from the Christian tradition.

Within Christian churches, the ideal of marriage has already been modified by all these factors. Within our church, the Book of Common Prayer elevates "mutual joy" as one of the purposes of marriage (p. 423). The spiritual dimensions of marriage have been elaborated in the Christian tradition to deepen and expand Paul's view of marriage as a poor alternative to celibacy or a remedy for lust (1 Cor 7). In light of all these factors, the liberal paper does not deny overwhelming evidence that biblical writers assumed heterosexual marriage. Our expansion of marriage, however, retains scriptural principles of moral discipline, nonconformity to the world, witness to Christ, sanctification, and holiness. We do not argue that biblical condemnations of homosexuality derive from a purity system that is obsolete for Christians. The question is not whether there should be distinctions made between sacred and profane and whether there should be rules for holy living, but what they should be in this time and place. How should this Christian community offer the gospel to its culture? We argue that in the North American context, for gay and lesbian couples to enter into Christian marriage blessed by the church, represents a powerful Christian witness.

### **Pastoral Responses to Gay and Lesbian Christians**

The traditionalist paper argues for abstinence, sublimation, or therapeutic change as the appropriate Christian responses to non-heterosexual orientations. We argue that these pastoral responses are inadequate. Extending marriage strengthens its connection to the love of Christ for the church by discouraging practices in the pastoral care of homosexual persons that have shown their strengths and weaknesses precisely by their approach to marriage. The trouble with marrying people to members of the opposite sex, when the opposite sex is not apposite for them, is that this undermines marriage. It leads to lying of the body, adultery, and divorce, instead of the truthfulness of the body, faithfulness, and constancy. While rare cases may justify marriages of gay and lesbian people to members of the opposite sex, it should be discouraged because the risks are too high: rather, same-sex marriages better represent Christ's self-offering for the world. Salvation in Christ arose not from a great self-refusal, but from a great self-gift. "For God so loved the world." "This is my body, given for you." To live out that pattern, marriage must not

bypass but, like the incarnation, take up the body in its movement of love. Marriage keeps love and the body together, as the incarnation and the Eucharist do. Certain alternatives to same-sex marriage fail because they “signify the mystery of Christ and the church” less adequately than marriage does. They do not take the body seriously enough for the incarnation.

Sometimes lesbian and gay persons enter into profound, long-term counseling relationships with spiritual directors or priests, in an attempt to turn their sexual desires in a faithful direction. The reason why these counseling relationships work, when they do work, is the same reason why opposite-sex marriages sometimes work, to some extent, for gay men and lesbians: they work precisely because they are marriage-like. They feature a designated other person to whom one makes oneself accountable and from whom it is hard to escape. However, opposite-sex marriages and long-term counseling relationships also fall short of the mark for the same reason: they are not marriage-like enough. Neither permits the full christological commitment of “this is my body, given for you.” Counseling deprives the counselee of the full christoform self-donation of giving his or her body. The counselee does not put his or her body on the line for the counselor as for a spouse. In a repudiation of the incarnation, they keep the body back from donation, evade incarnational cost. “The vocation to virginity must be something other than a frustration: it is a gift.”<sup>1</sup>

Opposite-sex marriages for gay and lesbian people should worry us. “Love, like martyrdom, cannot be imposed on someone.”<sup>2</sup> Only unions that follow the incarnation to befriend the body can hope that the martyrdom that they sometimes inspire will be not false witness, but true love. “It is possible that the most ascetic act [i.e., the best training in charity] is not renunciation of self, but total self-acceptance,” if it is oriented toward God and neighbor.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, ex-gay ministries fail to follow the incarnation, because they use the body to exercise self-control, rather than self-donation to another. Only in self-donation can God expand the body toward the Trinitarian exchange of gift, gratitude, and mutual joy. In self-donation, God became human. In self-donation, humans become open to God, but hardly in self-sufficiency. That resembles the pride that does not befriend but seeks to bypass and abandon the body.

Same-sex couples do not need marriage so that they can enjoy satisfaction, but so that they can practice sanctification. No traditionalist has ever yet seriously argued that same-sex couples need sanctification any less than opposite-sex couples do. Same-sex couples do not need marriage for self-expression: they need marriage for self-donation, for the daily challenges and rewards of loving one’s neighbor as oneself.

## **Science and Orientation**

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 167.

<sup>2</sup> Evdokimov, 188.

<sup>3</sup> Evdokimov, 100.



The traditionalist paper spends some effort contesting the biological science of sexual orientations and the social science of counting sexual minorities. Our argument rests on neither outcome. Scientific evidence about the cause of sexual orientation may be inconclusive, but scientific evidence about changing orientations is unanimous. Recognizing that individual orientations conduce to personal health, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexual orientation from its list of diseases in 1973. What some call “reparative therapy”—attempts to change non-heterosexual orientations—the American Psychological Association declared unethical in 1979. Whatever the mechanics of causation, health care professionals acknowledge sexual orientation as a given, prior to choice, a natural aptitude. It may be socially shaped but it does not go away. Minority orientations, whether they number in the few or many millions, cannot be ethically coerced into majority patterns of relationship.

Attempting to change a person’s orientation is unethical not only because it offends against personal integrity, but also because it betrays the very relationships in which we bear witness to the Spirit and through which God transforms us. Grace elevates nature; it does not destroy it. God transforms, changes, converts, and heals sinners, always in the direction for which God created them, for the relationships to which the Spirit calls them. The church as the body of God is not, then, in the business of destroying orientations, but of disciplining, realizing, and uplifting them. Grace is therapeutic for sinners by vindicating what God gives to each, enabling it to offer its own gifts to other persons, to the body of Christ, and to God.

The church does not need to await scientific certainty on the causes of sexual orientation in order to understand it as given. The will of God for human sexual practices does not lie in the gaps of research into orientations, for competing scientific theories nonetheless converge on a simple picture. We know that sexual orientation *begins* in the womb—whether by one gene, committees of genes, the hormonal environment, or some combination—and develops over time as the person does. As the Spirit creates variety in hovering over the waters of creation and diversifies the church in the waters of the font, so too the Spirit presides over the waters of the womb. "For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13).

Like other natural aptitudes, sexual orientation is a christological condition; it shapes ways of participating in the body of Christ. In the case of orientation, God in Christ orients desire godward through various capacities to desire others. The Spirit hovers over the waters of the womb to prepare all persons for inclusion in the body of Christ. What the Spirit prepares in the wombs of all women images what the Spirit prepared in the womb of Mary and anticipates what the Spirit prepares in the womb of the font: persons meant to find their destiny in Christ's body. John the Baptist exhibited this aptitude of desire for Christ by leaping in the womb of Elizabeth. The Spirit distributes many and various ways to desire Christ, for the sexual differentiations and orientations that begin in the womb prepare us for particular patterns of invitation to put our bodies on the line for others.

The church has as its mission to teach all sexually oriented persons how what they have been given is known and consecrated by God even before the womb (Jer. 1:5). The

church has as its mission to model relationships in which persons can offer themselves as gifts. We argue that to further this mission, we should extend marriage to same-sex couples.

### **Innovation, Diversity, and Communion**

The traditionalist paper characterizes our theology of marriage as new. On the contrary, while the practice of marrying same-sex couples would be new, our theology develops one of the three main ideas for marriage in the Christian traditions, and it defends that theory as everywhere implicit in the marriage rite of the Book of Common Prayer. Paul Evdokimov makes the crude but salient typology: the Catholic tradition has tended to base marriage on procreation; the Protestant tradition has tended to base marriage on the control of lust; and the Eastern Orthodox tradition has tended to base marriage on training in virtue, or sanctification.<sup>4</sup> The advantage of this third approach—the one adopted here—is that it easily accommodates the other two and orients them both to an even higher goal: growth into God. Traditional goods of marriage—children and faithfulness—make sense within this sacramental end. Marriage becomes a means by which God may bring a couple to himself, by exposing them to each other: they may grow into love of God, by practicing love of the nearest neighbor. The growth of a couple into God prompts them to welcome children and to practice faithfulness. This Protestant-Orthodox approach may make a good fit for Anglicanism, because it has always tried to take the best from a variety of sources, and because like Orthodoxy has always taken its theology from the liturgy.

These theologies of marriage are obviously not mutually exclusive. Marrying same-sex couples does not nullify other practices of marrying. The catholicity of the church cannot only accommodate but in fact requires these several witnesses to the marriage feast. That same-sex couples come late to the wedding feast is no reason to suppose they will cast out the others.

Matthew's parable of the laborers in the vineyard of the kingdom (Matt 20:1-15) describes the means by which those who came late to the employment office for the vineyard are paid the same as all day laborers on the basis of God's generous justice. Those who were able to commit early to the labor of the vineyard, which in this analogy is the grace and work of marriage, might well resent that others added to the workforce receive, at the end of the day, the same wages as those who "bore the burden of the day and the scorching heat." To them the vineyard owner explains that they are not unjustly treated: "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Greek: Is your eye evil because I am good?) What is given is not only generous, but as it is given by God, it is also just.

Those who challenge generous justice in the parable, having already been paid, seem envious that God's generosity extends to all who need it. Those who receive generous justice as the (unexpected) reward of their labors have only gratitude for God. Therefore, it is with those who come latterly to labor in the vineyard of marriage. They are the

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<sup>4</sup> Evdokimov, 15-22, 41-45.

recipients of God's surprising generosity for which we have nothing but gratitude. Here at the end of the day, are we not all laboring side by side in the vineyard of the kingdom?

We do not call for an end to disagreement, for that is part of the labor of our common baptism into God's mission. The Father sent the Son and the Spirit into a finite and fallen world where only diversity could image infinity and only history could reconcile them. Baptism prepares human beings for this arduous process by binding them together, and promises them that contrary to human expectations, their disagreement will have been for blessing: "thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies" (Ps 23:5). Under conditions of both diversity and division, disagreement can become a Spirit-given way of discerning the form of the Son. Baptism binds us together for the long process of making the body of Christ whole and complete in all its members. We are baptized into the Father, the Son, and the Spirit so that we can better disagree. The bonds of baptism tell us that there is no salvation without the others and require therefore the greatest freedom for disagreement rather than the narrowest slice of purity. For baptism's commission is to go out, and its purview is the whole world. This is not a formula for uniformity. We need the other to differ from us.

However, not all labors of disagreement seem fitting. We have disparaged lawsuits over church property as a way of conducting disagreements. Liturgy, not litigation, is the consequence of our theology of marriage. We have also asked traditional Anglicans to refuse to let their disagreement with us permit hatred of homosexual persons, and have entreated them to stand in public witness against persecution of homosexual persons. For both sides, when a church makes enemies, it is bound to love them; where a church finds sinners, it is invited to eat and drink with them.

During a previous period of church controversy, when an international Anglican Communion was first taking shape, the church was torn by conflict between Tractarian and Evangelical factions. Then, F. D. Maurice and other leaders counseled the church to listen to multiple witnesses to truth without becoming divided into parties, and so preserved the catholicity of Anglicanism. In Corinthians, Paul welcomes multiple evangelists for Christ, but asks the church not to become divided into parties. In the book of Acts, when Peter and Paul disagreed, the Spirit extended the church through controversy. The Spirit distributes bread for the journey and holds out the promise of Pentecost that our different languages will not have been spoken in vain. It is the same Spirit who dilates the womb, expands the church, extends time, and opens debate.

## EPILOGUE

In conclusion, our work sustains one generally accepted observation and adds several doctrinal and practical considerations to the broader discussion. It is generally accepted that differing hermeneutical presuppositions produce conflicting readings of the same texts. This is not a matter of how highly one or another holds the authority of Scripture but the lens through which it is read. Hermeneutical clarity and integrity, difficult as it is, would seem to be of great help in future scriptural analysis.

Further, our collective voice perhaps highlights several pneumatological loci. One is the role of the Spirit in bringing the church into all truth (John 16.3). Can we ever be certain that the witness of the Spirit that we perceive to be working among us is not our own voice writ large rather than the voice of the Holy Spirit? Further, should that caution prevent the church from acting in some circumstances?

A second pneumatological concern arises from the belief that the Spirit guides us in holiness of life that Paul develops in Romans and First Corinthians. The question here is what constitutes a holy sexual life and what role ought marriage play in regulating it. This issue pertains to many people, among whom homosexuals are, no doubt the minority. The liberal document herein offers a theology of marriage from one perspective. Perhaps more pneumatological reflection on sexual holiness is warranted given the radically changed sexual mores of the northern hemisphere and the reality that marriage seems to be fading among heterosexuals in various parts of the world.

Should the Episcopal Church seriously consider the liberal proposal for reimagining marriage, practical questions would also arise. The new practice would raise the question of the relationship between ordination and marriage across the board. For instance, the Episcopal Church has been ordaining and consecrating non-celibate homosexuals because marriage is not legally available to them. Would that practice be called into question if the Episcopal Church normalized same-sex marriages? The examination of candidates for the priesthood and the diaconate, has ordinands pledge to be “a wholesome example... to your people” (p. 532) and “to all people” (p. 544). Would marriage become required for ordination for all non-celibate persons so that the wholesomeness that they embody would surely include sexual holiness? That is, would sexual scrutiny need to become part of the ordination process regardless of orientation for the sake of consistency?

A further issue would arise. In the United States, the minister validates the marriage on behalf of the state and then calls on the Spirit in the nuptial blessing. What would be the status of nuptially blessed couples in states that do not authorize or recognize same-sex marriage? In that case, what would be the difference between same-sex marriages and blessing rites?

While the Episcopal Church has responded to questions and requests put to it by the instruments of unity over the past seven years, it has not until now invited its theologians and scholars to tackle the theological and doctrinal issues at stake in this great debate. As professionally trained theologians, historians and exegetes, we often become absorbed in

the debates in our various fields and subfields and sit on the sidelines without much role in the church's self-reflection. We are grateful that the House of Bishops has a theology committee on which professional theologians sit and we are all honored to have been invited to offer our gifts at the table. We pray that our work may contribute to the well-being of the body of Christ.

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer, p. 255.)

The Editor

## POSTSCRIPT

We are enormously grateful to the panel of scholars and theologians who have worked so hard to produce these papers. Their work is for study and reflection and does not constitute a position paper of the Theology Committee. It is very significant in itself that brothers and sisters in Christ who hold differing views about such a contested matter have worked together, sharpening each other's views without coming to any false or over-easy resolutions. We need more occasions and examples of this sort of conversation.

We commissioned this panel in hope, and the panelists in many respects have fulfilled our hopes. They cannot be expected to represent all of the different views or to have answered all the questions about this complex matter. Hence, this afterword provides a response to these papers that may help people read them together. We also want to point out areas where further work, discussion, and debate await our attention.

Anyone reading these papers will immediately recognize that they reflect two different styles of doing theology and represent different genres of theological writing. Most of us will find that we are more readily disposed towards one (or neither) of these styles. When that is the case, the challenge we face as readers is to manifest interpretive charity toward alternative styles and genres. Interpretive charity is not a way of glossing over or denying real and profound disagreements. Rather, it is the commitment to read a document in its best possible light, in ways that seek to maximize our agreements with it, without denying points of weakness or disagreement. In this particular case, interpretive charity also recognizes that both parties seek to order their faith and practice faithfully before the triune God. Disagreement here does not entail condemnation of our opponents.

In addition, readers of these papers will probably recognize that most of us enter such a conversation with a working model of same-sexuality and certain assumptions inherent in that model. There is a spectrum of such models: same-sexuality can be described as an offense in the sight of God to be destroyed, a sin to be repented of, a disorder to be controlled, a failure to live up to an agreed-upon standard, an interesting physical difference (like left-handedness or right-handedness), or a precious gift of God, a blessing to be celebrated and not scorned. The model we bring inevitably shapes our reaction to a proposed argument or vision.

The papers manifest real differences, but we note that they converge at some points. We wonder where the panelists' conversations might have gone had they explored these connections more directly. For example, Romans 1, Acts 15, and Ephesians 5 come up for discussion in both papers in ways that invite further discussion and reflection on these important passages. It is clear that both papers take Holy Scripture seriously. It is also clear that each group brought a different set of interpretive constraints and considerations to bear on these texts. There may not be an easy way to adjudicate these larger interpretive issues. Nevertheless, much is to be gained by arguing over specific texts such as these in the light of these different hermeneutical approaches.

Another point of connection relates to the discussion of “orders of creation” in one paper and the discussion of what is “natural” and “unnatural” in the other. Engaging scientific study of sexual orientation might also fit within this overall discussion.

Both papers discuss the place of marriage in the Christian life. This discussion would benefit from an expansion in at least two directions. First, in light of the contributions of these two papers, there is significant theological work to be done on the “ascetical” dimension of marriage. Again, there is also more to be said both on the relationships between divine and human love and on the ways in which we might understand patterns of self-giving and the integrity of the self in human relationships.

In a second direction, these papers invite further discussion of how understandings of marriage have been constructed over time; how the church has engaged and reformed these understandings; and how, within the Anglican Communion, diverse theologies and practices of marriage have existed and still exist within the same church. The matters we indicate for further study are suggestive but not exhaustive.

Furthermore, in a cultural and ecclesial context marked more by failures of conversation on such charged matters, by anathemas and excommunications, whether overtly secular or purportedly religious, we find hope in the fact that in grace all parties still see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. This itself witnesses to the power of the Gospel.

We are convinced, however, that the church needs to move to a better place than we currently occupy. We hope that a theological, ecclesiological, and moral synthesis that will garner widespread agreement will one day emerge. In the meantime, we cannot deny that we are connected to each other. Disagreement and debate on these matters of profound importance do not entail disunity.

It is a sign of hope that this panel accomplished its work together rather than as separate and separated believers. That there is more to do should not frustrate that hope. Instead, with Paul, we pray, “May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).

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