

## A Theology of Marriage including Same-Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals

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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 do. 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 rereading 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:

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“the union between 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 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” (1979 *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 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 with another?

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

#### *Mission*

By mission does the church live; “you will be my witnesses,” says the risen Jesus (Acts 1:8). Disagreements among the churches over blessing the marriages of same-sex couples arise from zeal for mission. 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

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 423. Future references (1979 *BCP*) by page number in text.

<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

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 amidst 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 participate. Mission begins with the Father sending the Son and the Spirit to bring into the feast those different from God. “For us and for our salvation he [Christ] 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, 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 the Spirit gathers. The church learns to bear witness by reading, eating, and praying with all those whom God has called to bear witness. The church takes part in the missions of the trinitarian

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speak officially for a theological school or ecclesial tradition, although we occasionally refer to “liberals” and “conservatives” when gesturing to colloquial categories.

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 proclaim the gospel to its neighbors in its cultural context. Those neighbors include same- and other-sex couples living 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 banquet for his son” (Matt. 22:2). 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 nuptial testimony of same-sex couples. In those couples who desire to give their lives in self-donation to one another the church has discovered 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 the church should welcome Gentiles into its universal mission, so does the church today hold theological council. 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 mouths, 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 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.

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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), 200–216; here, 210.

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. They 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 our lives as *logoi* in the Logos, or words in the Word, "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed 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 10:34–35).

### *Reading Scripture*

As Christian theologians we participate in the church's ongoing interpretation of the Bible. Scripture is authoritative for our work. The church's expanded company of those reading and following Scripture, its desire to live in communion with sinners and to bless one

another have led to different interpretations of scriptural teachings. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* V.5, *De Genesi ad litteram* 1; Aquinas, *De potentia* 4, 1, r.

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. However, the New Testament does suggest 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 (Mark 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 views that radically relativize the traditional family in preference for celibacy or "spiritual" family and those that make the traditional family, which 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" (1979 *BCP*, 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 various interpretations 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 (1979 *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. Scripture is read in a 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 to interpret Scripture by being the body of Christ. It learns the truth of Scripture by living from marriage to its Bridegroom, 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 the church 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 the 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>5</sup> These are the practices that take us out of fascination with ourselves, our 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 God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). The church, in expanding the community of the forgiven, has not found any without need of forgiveness.<sup>6</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 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 (1979 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.

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 97.

<sup>6</sup> James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

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 community 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. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Mark 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 defensively used languages of rights and struggle in order 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 already a 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 does 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 lifelong 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). Amidst similar dissension and debate in our church, here is what we propose: traditionalists should not break table-fellowship. Same-sex couples must avoid unchastity: they 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 us do part” (1928 BCP, 301). The marriage vows mark marriage 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 (Mark 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” (1979 *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—give rise 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” (1979 *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 to the marriage rite puts it (1662 *BCP*). Patristic and medieval commentaries on the Song of Songs taught the church to see in *eros* the hope for *agape*.<sup>7</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 *are not* practicing 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

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 13, in *Cantico Canticorum*, PG 44:1048C.

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>8</sup>

The vows of marriage mirror, and in Russian theology derive from, monastic vows.<sup>9</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 *BCP*, 279). 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>10</sup>

The preface to the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* puts the discipline of the vows into a christological context and tells us straightforwardly what marriage means. Marriage "signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church" (1979 *BCP*, 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, which is given for you (Luke 22:19)." A proper preface to the Eucharist makes this connection between marriage and the Eucharist: "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,

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<sup>8</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 Rogers, ed., *Theology and Sexuality*, 174–177, and David McCarthy, "The Relationship of Bodies," 206–213, with references to Cooke.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 65–84, abridged and reprinted in Rogers, ed., *Theology and Sexuality*, 186–191.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, *In Epist. ad Ephesios Homilia XX*, PG 62:147; *In illud, propter fornicationes uxorem*, PG 51:209. Quoted in Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, 164.

that he might make the whole creation new” (1979 *BCP*, 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” when it continues, “It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church” (1979 *BCP*, 423). Marriage is the sign and atonement is the reality. Marriage is temporary (“till death us do part”); the wedding of the Lamb endures forever (Luke 20:34–35). 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*, a sign or symbol. As the author of Ephesians explains: “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church” (5:30–32). 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. Couples who approach the church for marriage—and 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 to 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 the marriage theology of Ephesians 5 shows 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 1 and another in chapter 2. Neither Jesus nor Paul relates Genesis 1 to

marriage, except where Jesus quotes it against divorce (Mark 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:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to 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 wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 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.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that 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 earth, and to every bird 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. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, 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 (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:4), and that of St. Paul (Eph. 5:31).”<sup>11</sup> Certainly, the passage associates the

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<sup>11</sup> Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, 22. The quotation is run together with his note 12; note 11 in the same paragraph cites Origen’s *Commentary on Matthew*, Book XIV, chap. 16, PG 13:1229.

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 longer ‘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 (*ouk . . . kai*) to read “no longer ‘male *and* female.’” 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” (Psalm 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).<sup>12</sup>

Thus Paul, when he does quote Genesis 1:27 at Galatians 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 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.

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<sup>12</sup> This sentence shortens and uses to a different purpose one by Richard Norris, “The Ordination of Women and the ‘Maleness’ of Christ,” *Anglican Theological Review*, Supplementary Series 6 (1976), 79, reprinted “with minor revisions” in *The Feminine in the Church*, ed. Monica Furlong (London: SPCK, 1984), 84.

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>13</sup> God bounds the command by time and sufficiency.

That is not all. Filling the earth is not just quantitative but qualitative, so that the Genesis command ends in “dominion.” To Paul, as Chrysostom reads him, 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>14</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—that Cyril of Jerusalem recognizes as a rite of adoption<sup>15</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 or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13). 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

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<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom, “Sermon on Marriage,” in *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 85.

<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom, “Homily I on Marriage,” in Rogers, ed., *Theology and Sexuality*, 90.

<sup>15</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, PG 33.1081B.

interpretation of Genesis 2 to 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 will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself" (Eph. 5:31–33).

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). Love is to be practiced, 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>16</sup>

We may summarize this line of thought as follows. Marriage begins in *eros*, and ends in *caritas*. *Eros* refers to the "one flesh" (*sarkamian*) for which one leaves father and mother (Eph. 5:31). *Caritas* refers to loving the other as one loves oneself (5:33). 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

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<sup>16</sup> Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, 70.

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 too 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 (1 Peter 2:9). 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.

By interpreting gender christologically, the typology of Ephesians and the *Book of Common Prayer* excludes 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 be aflame with passion” (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 our “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" (Psalm 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*, in which the creature follows Christ to come as near to another person as a creature can. Orientating desire to Christ means that sexual orientation is a *moral* matter. 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 who need them *for their own sanctification*. They need this 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. 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 come 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>17</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, they 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 better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.”

When two women or two men vow lifelong faithfulness to one another in marriage, they order their sexual desires in relationship. It

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 14.7. Maximus the Confessor devotes *Ambiguum* 7 to expanding this idea.

is, indeed, marriage that makes the 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.

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 (John 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 (Matt. 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 (1979 BCP, 425). We ask God’s assistance more widely. We urge more couples to seek God’s blessing and to see new signs that God looks mercifully upon those who do. “Marriage does not justify love; it is its grace.”<sup>18</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

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<sup>18</sup> Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, 187.

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>19</sup>

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

### *One God and One People*

Even as a school for virtue, marriage is no final end, but trains us for another reality. "It signifies to us the union between Christ and his Church" (1979 *BCP*, 423). 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 separate" (Mark 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" (1979 *BCP*, 423). It is because God loves God's people "that there is such a thing as love and marriage."<sup>20</sup> Because God reaches out to God's people in

<sup>19</sup> "On the Lament of the Mother of God," stanza 13, in St. Romanos the Melodist, *On the Life of Christ: Kontakia*, trans. Ephrem Lash (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper-Collins, 1995), 148.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 318.

mission there has come to be love and marriage for couples of the same sex.

*“To Uphold These Two Persons in their Marriage”*

*The Third Vow*

The marriage vows make marriage an ascetic discipline for sanctification. 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 signals 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 that 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 refusing to celebrate same-sex weddings 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 participation in the work of the Spirit. Refusal to celebrate weddings incurs its own moral risk:

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. . . . Then he said to his slaves, . . . ‘Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was

speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matt. 22:1–3, 8–13)

Parables work on many levels. Jesus’ 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 that 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, bear witness and take part in the Spirit’s office of upholding fidelity.

The priest prompts a *third* vow: “Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage?” and the people answer, “We will” (1979 *BCP*, 425). “The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding *banquet*”: 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 (Rom. 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 (Rom. 8:23) that 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 and that the couple 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 (1979 *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. Inasmuch 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 all in your power to uphold these two persons 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 been 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. Either Paul or a rival preacher whom he quotes<sup>21</sup> associates same-sex desire with those same Gentiles. Romans 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 the Jews behind 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

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<sup>21</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, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), and more recently Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009).

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; 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 wrought 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>22</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 reader to think of the horticultural terms *paraphusas*, *paraphusis*, a graft or insertion. The use of *para phusin* in Romans 11 recasts 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

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<sup>22</sup> Dale Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18–32,” *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 332–55.

Gentiles by the very word with which he or his rival had previously stereotyped them.<sup>23</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. 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."

Paul also reminds the marriage debates that the Spirit of marriage—which is the Spirit that binds Christ and the church—is the Spirit whose gift is faithfulness (Gal. 5:22, 1 Cor. 12:9) and the one Romans calls "the Spirit of adoption" (8:15, 8:23)—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 of blood or of the will of the flesh or of 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 reared "in the knowledge and love of the Lord" (1979 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

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<sup>23</sup> Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 108–109.

baptism “betrothed to Christ” and therefore “dowered with the Holy Spirit,” in the technical sense of a widow receiving an inalienable share of her dead husband’s property.<sup>24</sup> According to the hymn:

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.

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>25</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>26</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 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

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<sup>24</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Oration II* (formerly *Oration III*) in *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, p. 80, ll. 7f.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob of Serugh, translated as “Jacob of Serugh II,” in Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 287.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on the Veil of Moses*, 11.141–51, in Sebastian Brock, *Studies in Syriac Spirituality*, Syrian Churches Series 13 (Poonah, India: Anita Printers, 1988), 95.

prayer that Athanasius put on the lips of Christ: “As Thou hast given me to bear this body, grant to them Thy Spirit.”<sup>27</sup>

The paradigm for the body in Christianity is Jesus’ remark, “This is my body, given for you.” With that, Jesus subverts and redeploys a structure of violent oppression—the 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. Take it, I give it to you.”<sup>28</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 Christians are saved *by*. 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. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, *did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped*” (RSV). Here the incarnation precisely reverses the fall: Christ undoes Adam’s grasping after equality with God. Marriage teaches creatures to “let this same mind be in you”: they are to participate in Christ’s reversal of the fall by intentionally

<sup>27</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Orations Against the Arians* III.25.23.

<sup>28</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. For a longer account, see Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 249–268 and Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., “Nature with Water and the Spirit: A Response to Rowan Williams,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 89–100; here, 92–96.

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 them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).

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 effect of the fall, not recoil from it: they felt shame because they failed to become God, because they were creatures still.<sup>29</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 regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped.” Christ also repaired the fall positively when he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Christ repaired the fall by taking on the body, not by scorning it. “*Therefore* God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend”—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 passersby, mockers, and

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<sup>29</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, ed., *Theology and Sexuality*, 157–169.

the thieves crucified with him to “let him come down from the cross now, . . . let God deliver him” (Matt. 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 for worse, in sickness and in health, till death us do 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 us do 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 “by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen. 3:19). This command becomes the means 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” (1979 *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” (1979 *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 Simplician. 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>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

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *Ad Simplicianum* I.ii.21.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1967, 2000), 154–155, 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, “The 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. This is not individual or even couple-centered joy. It 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 (Psalm 118:24; Rev. 19:7).

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<sup>32</sup> *Confessions* XII.xvi.23, as translated by Peter Brown in *Augustine of Hippo*, 155.

<sup>33</sup> Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism, 1979 BCP, 862.

<sup>35</sup> Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in Rogers, ed., *Theology and Sexuality*, 312.

