

Postscript

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

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

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

In addition, readers of these papers will probably recognize that most of us enter such a conversation with a working model of same-sexuality and certain assumptions inherent in that model. There is a spectrum of such models: same-sexuality can be described as an offense in the sight of God, a sin to be repented of, a disorder to be controlled, a failure to live up to an agreed-upon standard, an interesting physical difference (like left-handedness or right-handedness),

or a precious gift of God, a blessing to be celebrated. The model we bring inevitably shapes our reaction to any proposed argument or vision.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Theology Committee

The Rt. Rev. John C. Bauerschmidt
 The Rt. Rev. Larry R. Benfield
 The Rt. Rev. Thomas E. Breidenthal
 The Rt. Rev. Joe G. Burnett
 Dr. Ellen T. Charry
 The Rev. Dr. Sathianathan Clarke
 Dr. Stephen E. Fowl
 The Rev. Dr. A. Katherine Grieb
 The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris
 The Rt. Rev. Robert W. Ihloff
 The Rt. Rev. Paul V. Marshall
 Dr. Charles T. Mathewes
 Dr. Joy A. McDougall
 The Rt. Rev. Henry N. Parsley, Jr., Chair
 The Rt. Rev. George Wayne Smith
 Dr. Kathryn Tanner

