Executive Summary

Once upon a time I was a Canterbury scholar, and had the privilege of worshipping every morning with the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Perhaps the most important thing ++Rowan taught me was that the asterisk at the end of each clause in our Psalter is essential to our identity: it means we are a people who pause to allow everyone to catch up so that we move forward to the next step as one.

In this paper, I argue that we need to pause once again so that we may all move together. I respond to the Task Force on Marriage but especially to criticisms offered by Bishop John Bauerschmidt, Dr. Wesley Hill, Jordan Hylden, and Zachary Guillano. I understand that the Task Force generated a report aimed at a particular audience - General Convention. I agree with these four critics, who published their essay as part of the Fully Alive Project, that we now need to do the tougher work of providing an account of a potential decision to redefine marriage that now addresses the communion of saints, to whom we are accountable, both synchronically and diachronically. The current report did not seek to do that and therefore that work is left undone.

I part with the Fully Alive Project in that I begin my musings with the starting point of the Task Force: the assumption that we are already embracing same-sex marriage. Given this fact on the ground, I begin with the premise that the task before us is to imagine a robust theology that makes our actions comprehensible to this broader audience, which also includes future generations of Episcopalians. What is it we understand ourselves to be doing, and why did we adopt a new understanding of marriage? My paper is a thought experiment: what might such a theology look like?

I depart from the Fully Alive authors in concluding that such a theology is possible. The heart of my paper sketches this, with the expectation that others may build upon my musings. My conclusion is that such a theology is possible, but we still need to flesh it out. In particular, we need to pause to give an account of how we will preserve the good we have received as we move forward with reform. In my view, we need more work in clarifying how we won't annihilate key differences that we historically have received as blessings, and how we will prevent commoditization of human sexuality. My hope is that our next step will be to pause, let everyone catch up, answer those questions, and take the next step together.

Introduction

Recently, the Task Force on Marriage asked an important question. They asked, “How do we think about marriage?” Some of my colleagues - Bishop John Bauerschmidt, Dr. Wesley Hill, Jordan Hylden, and Zachary Guillano - replied by answering a different question: “Is same-sex marriage possible?” They put forth their critique in what they dub the Fully Alive Project, a web site sponsored by the Communion Partners. They answered brilliantly. Deeply. Helpfully. Ultimately, however, I am not persuaded of some of their conclusions. For pragmatic reasons, I think it is insufficient for us to “just say no.” With Robert Song, I

think it may be *possible* to imagine a theology of marriage that incorporates the many same-sex marriages in our part of the Church. Moreover, given the reality of The Episcopal Church, it strikes me as imprudent for us not to struggle with a positive effort to do so.

What follows is my own effort to do just that. Like the Task Force (apparently) and in contrast with the Fully Alive essayists, I begin with the premise that The Episcopal Church is going to create a rite that blesses same-sex marriages. We already have! For this thought experiment, I assume that as a given, and try to think through what a robust theology incorporating same-sex marriage might entail. My goal is to imagine the skeleton of such a theology, leaving to others the challenge of the robust account.

A few preliminary qualifications: I've not tried to produce a document with the rigor achieved by others engaged in this conversation, and I've not tried to be comprehensive, primarily because of the limited resources I've been able to commit. I take the Task Force Report, the Fully Alive Project essays, and especially Robert Song's *Covenant and Calling (*which I believe is the best effort so far aimed at this task*)* as my starting point. I assume readers are familiar with the ground already tilled for us and for the most part rely on that without revisiting it. As both the Task Force and Ephraim Radner note, this is necessarily a project in constructive theology because it is new ground. As Tobias Haller, notes, there is no off-the-shelf full blown account that makes sense of the data to which we can turn. Accordingly, I apologize in advance to those allergic to the constructive method. I imagine this not as a journal article but more like a long open love letter to my Church in which I take the risk of sharing my own private musings, and offer them as a response to my colleagues which I hope carries forward an expanding conversation. Once I send it, I intend to duck.

In what follows, I begin with a brief explanation of why I think such imagining is prudent. Since I frame the question in terms of holiness, I borrow from Ephraim Radner to reflect on the concept of holiness. I continue to follow Radner in reflecting on the meaning of blessing, but that leads quickly to a thought experiment on what marriage actually is which is sure to be provocative to my traditionalist colleagues. I pivot to a new conception of marriage using a Wittgensteinian allusion, which leads me to propose some language rules that I believe ought to circumscribe a theology of marriage. With that ground clearing, I jump into a brief exegetical exploration through which I try to discern what makes marriage holy. I conclude by punting the ball back to Robert Song, and with a summary of the work that I believe still needs to be done prior to changing our ecclesial practice canonically.

Why These Musings?

The Task Force on Marriage began with what they evidently saw as a given: that the question of whether or not TEC is going to embrace same-sex marriage has already been answered affirmatively, and so the task before us at General Convention 2015 is to create the canonical and liturgical structures to make that happen. In order to do that, they reflected on the nature of marriage, producing a 122-page report exploring the "biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage." In addition, they

proposed canonical changes they see as necessary to implement their vision for a same-sex rite. Underlying their vision is a set of premises about what makes marriage holy.

For many on both sides of the question, the need for a conversation about all this is frustrating.

I am aware that some ask, “If marriage is about love, if our culture has largely embraced same-sex marriage, and if we’ve decided to be a church marked by hospitality, why are we still talking about this? And if, as many believe, this is a matter of social justice, why would we pause even a second longer to ask what it is that makes marriage holy? And if marriage is a means of grace, why do we need to justify grace? The time for action is now!”

Others are frustrated for quite different reasons. “The Spirit has better things to do than rewrite the canon, or to dispense dubious revelations that say, at the end of it all, that the Church has had it wrong for 2,000 years. I don’t have time for this!”

But, in fact, the question matters immensely. What’s at stake is avoiding blasphemy. And we can blaspheme in both directions on this question. For whenever we claim that our actions are a means of grace, we are claiming that when we do them, in some way the real presence of Christ is visible in them. At stake is the possibility of blasphemy, which is to claim God's union with us in our doing that which is false, such as murdering, stealing, or any of the other ways we choose the opposite of the good. When a priest blesses a thing, he or she names with the full authority of the Church that we do not blaspheme when we associate Christ's real presence with our action. That's always a risk in any ethical question. So too here we have the question of speaking authoritatively on the setting into service a couple who agree to be bound in particular ways to each other and live in a way reflective of and in response to the covenant of grace. If we want to empower priests canonically and constitutionally to make such claims on behalf of the whole Church, we have a duty to articulate to the universal Church why we believe this change is warranted. Similarly, if we deny blessing that which God blesses, and in God’s name refuse the blessing, then we have that same risk of blasphemy. In order to navigate in either direction, we need to be able to explain what makes marriage holy.

The Task Force no doubt felt it answered this question sufficiently. Recently, however, a group of colleagues - the Fully Alive Project - weighed in with a multi-faceted critique of the Task Force Report. They began with a different premise. For them the question is not, “What makes marriage holy?” Rather, they began with a prior question, the answer to which the Task Force evidently assumed is a given: “Is same-sex marriage even a theological possibility?” Their answer: “No, because marriage is a divine gift through which Christ conquers death.” (That’s my crude summary of their reference to Ephraim Radner’s theology of marriage, on which their account loosely depends).

I think both the Task Force and those who responded via the Fully Alive Project have made marvelous contributions. The contribution of the latter seems to me to consist principally in helping us to see that we’ve not yet hit the standard of rigor required to make our case for changing our conception of marriage that we must make for ourselves and our

ecumenical partners, both now and across time. But I am not persuaded that their "No" to same-sex marriage suffices. With Robert Song, I believe it is possible for us to imagine a rite by which priests bless same sex unions while conserving the good we have received from previous generations. To that effort, I now turn.

"What is holiness?"

I greatly appreciate Tobias Haller's framing of the question with careful language, "What makes marriage holy?" That's where I begin. I invoke the ghost of George Lindbeck to propose that we'll never make progress if we resort to the category of 'sacrament.' We need to avoid the category of 'sacrament' because we'll quickly get lost and at odds to one another as we get caught up in our medieval differences about what makes a thing sacramental. Throughout my musings, I will try to avoid using traditional sacramental language and explanations to talk about marriage. That will seem odd to some, but you now know why. "Holiness," however, is promising in that it is a biblical category and the exegetical coordinates of the word ought not be controversial.

To bring the meaning of 'holiness' into view, we can turn to Leviticus, the well from which the Jewish and Christian conception springs. For convenience, I'll let Ephraim Radner serve as our guide (see Radner's *Leviticus: A Commentary* for exegetical support of the following).

Reflecting on Lev 5, we learn that philologists connect the Hebrew root, *qad*, with 'separateness.' Radner notes, the "one crucial element of being "set apart" in this context is the goal: set apart "for God," becoming, as it were, the "possession" of God" ("Leviticus 5:14-19," para 4). Furthermore, this separateness has a temporal purpose; "holiness is 'for the sake of…'" other persons. ("Leviticus 10," last para). Moreover, holiness is not a quality or attribute of a thing, but a "description of how God in fact temporally wills to act with respect to his creation, by coming to it with his whole being" ("Leviticus 19:1-2," para 1). Most importantly, "If holiness is about separation, then it is a separation for the sake of granting life and the giving over of oneself as the basis for its very being." ("Leviticus 19:1-2," para 4), and "Holiness as a human reality, conversely, is responsive to this act of divine offering—" for I the LORD your God am holy." Indeed, it is finally derivative of it ("Leviticus 19:1-2," para 17). Radner summarizes, "The laws of holiness, then, are intimately bound to the nature of God's selfcoming to his creatures in time: they constitute a participation somehow in that very coming" ("Leviticus 19:1-2," para 18).

So far, what can we say about what makes a thing holy? To be holy is to be:

- Set apart
- … as a possession of God
- … for the sake of other persons
- … for the sake of granting life and the giving over of oneself
- … responsive to the divine self-offering
- … as a means of God's selfcoming.

These attributes of the concept of holiness will guide the reflections that follow.

Blessing a Marriage

I turn now to the question of blessing. What does it mean for a presbyter to bless a thing? Again, I enlist Radner as a guide, simply because his lecture on the etymology of 'blessing' has guided my own self-understanding of my role as a priest (see Ephraim Radner, "Blessing: A Scriptural and Theological Reflection," *Pro Ecclesia* 19 (2010), 7-27). Here things get a bit murky because popular usage has diverged from the technical meaning within the Church. For that reason, some unpacking is in order.

I've always found Radner's opening point fascinating. The relevant denotations of the Hebrew verb, *barak*, from which we derive our concept of blessing, is "to kneel" or "to adore" (*Blessing*, 1). Generally, blessing is the action of God. B*arak* brings quickly into view the image of our Lord disrobing and kneeling before us to wash our feet, which evokes both John 13 and Phil. 2:5-11. That's an appropriate place to begin a reflection on what it means to bless because it visually depicts an important theological claim: that God's self-established identity is being-in-action, and not just any action, but action that generates and sustains creation. God kneels in order to raise his adored creation to its fulfillment. Which is to say that all blessing originates in divine action (*Blessing*, 2).

In the liturgy, we often say, "Let us bless the Lord!" How do humans bless God? Radner makes an observation that will become important below when we turn to the question of what make a marriage holy: by "liv[ing] the life given in the proper relationship of dependent recipient" (Blessing, 5). Through his reflection on the meaning of blessing, Radner foreshadows what we will discover below. We bless the Lord by living eucharistically in reconciled fellowship with God and each other.

Of course, divine blessing is mediated temporally through created things. A blessing of an object is in fact a shorthand that invokes the divine power to bless: it is a thanksgiving for that which God alone provides, along with the petition that God sustain life through the object. A blessing of a person is simply an invocation of same divine power to bless, a petition that we more pithily pray as "Thy will be done" (*Blessing*, 7).

Yet, things get more complex when a presbyter blesses. For a presbyter's blessing is an authoritative proclamation, on behalf of the Church, that, in our enjoyment of a thing, we believe "the actual purposes of God's life" are made visible (9). Or, in the New Testament's usage (*eulogia*), we authoritatively proclaim that a thing is good, and that its goodness is "from God's creative hand for God's life-giving purpose" (*Blessing*, 10).

From the foregoing, it is important to note that the blessing of a presbyter *does not change a thing's nature*. The authoritative proclamation of a presbyter that we (the Church) believe a thing is good does not make it good. Additionally, the presbyter's blessing of a thing does not cause it to be holy, though both our shorthand and our ecclesial behavior - particularly in baptism, ordination, and marriage - can be confusing on this matter (*Blessing*, 12). In the divine freedom, God alone acts to make God's life visible. Accordingly, our authoritative blessing does not cause a thing to become holy, but rather names the

coordinates where we have historically encountered the reality of the divine self-offering, and petitions God once again to meet us when we return to that hidden place.

This is a crucial theological claim, so let me elaborate with a few examples.

A prayer shawl, a category which I bless regularly in my parish, does not change in any way by virtue of my authoritative blessing. Rather, my blessing is in fact shorthand for (a) a naming of our communal experience that when we dedicate prayer shawls to a particular use, God's life-giving action has been made visible in such use, and (b) a petition that God will once again meet us in such use. Put another way, my authoritative blessing is a petition, grounded in rational hope, that God will make a particular instance of the category, prayer shawl, more than it is without divine action. My prayer is that God will change the prayer shawl *ontologically* in the sense of making it more than the mere work of human hands, but, through divine re-purposing, an instrument of divine life-giving presence for a *particular* son or daughter of God. My blessing causes no change, but is a prayer that, as in ages past, God will draw near as we enjoy the prayer shawl in a particular way that we believe to be aligned to God's life-giving purpose.

Similarly, when a bishop, with the authority invested by the people of God, ordains a person into the holy order of presbyters, the bishop does not thereby cause the presbyter to be holy. Rather, the proclamation of the bishop and community is a shorthand for (a) a naming of our communal experience that when we set apart persons for the ministry of presbyters, God's life-giving action has met us in their faithful ministry, and (b) a petition that God will once again meet us in the particular instance of the category, presbyter, whom we ordain that day. Ordination causes no change, but is a prayer that, as in ages past, God will create an ontological change by repurposing the ordinand - which is to say that we pray that God will draw near as we enjoy the ministry of the new presbyter - to the extent that his or her ministry aligns with God's life-giving purpose.

The example of marriage is a bit more complex. When a presbyter blesses a marriage, he or she neither causes the couple to be married nor causes the marriage to become holy. I'll need to unpack this a bit, so let me first consider what marriage *is* in an intentionally unconventional way, for my purpose is to suggest that our current troubles arise at least in part from categorical confusion. Bear with me in what follows, because my hope is to shed light on our current troubles with the method of a thought experiment that intentionally challenges the meanings of words we think we understand.

What is marriage?

It seems to me that all sides in our conversation accept as a given that we can reasonably name marriage as a created good, a divine means through which God unites certain instances of sexed creatures, and through their *ongoing* exclusive union, creates and sustains both *ekklesia* and *polis*, as well as couples themselves. In contrast with my colleagues who commend the Augustinian account of marriage as the ground of our thinking, however, I propose that marriage is *distinct from procreative possibility*, though dependent on it.

Much of our recent discussion of marriage relies upon Augustine, who described marriage in terms of the three fruits of offspring, faithfulness, and permanence. My suggestion is that we benefit by thinking about marriage with some Aristotelian concepts that help us understand objects more comprehensively. Taking Augustine seriously while translating into Aristotle's four causes, the relationship between these goods becomes more clear.

- The material cause ("that out of which it comes") of a marriage is a set of two sexed creatures from a different set of parents.

- The efficient cause ("the primary source of the change") of a marriage are the vows which commit the creatures to a common life of a particular form. This claim is with the Task Force Report and *pace* the Fully Alive essayists.

Since this contradicts my colleagues who name procreation as the *telos* of marriage, I must pause to explain this further. Procreative power is also an efficient cause, but it is a *secondary instrumental* cause. I rely here on the logic of Francisco Suarez to suggest that the procreative power of parents is to a household's procreative power as prior heat is to a fire's heat. "If heat is called a fire's instrument for producing heat, then even though it is conjoined to the fire *secundum esse*, it can be called a separated instrument *secundum causalitatem*, since in order to produce heat it does not require an influence over and beyond its own proper power" (Quotes from Suarez, DM 17, sect. 2). Just as when we gaze upon a fire, we know it is caused by heat and yet reasonably comprehend that a fire is more than heat, so too we reasonably recognize that a marriage is caused by procreative power but not identical to its procreative power.

- The formal cause ("the account of what-it-is-to-be") of a marriage is a *household* characterized by offspring, faithfulness, and permanence.

Notice that the suggestion here is that what many, following Augustine, call the fruits of a marriage, constitute the *shape* of the marriage, and not its *telos*. With the Task Force and Robert Song, I will later name offspring a *contingent* fruit of a marriage, for, though offspring necessarily dominate the normal distribution of marriages, we readily recognize as marriage instances that do not have children.

- The final cause ("the *telos*", "that for the sake of which a thing is done") of a marriage is fellowship with God and with each other. By fellowship, I denote what the tradition has described as participation in the life of God, which for all creatures - in different ways - is conformance to the Eternal Law.

Those who see procreation as the *telos* of marriage because "being born is important," implicitly argue that the point of being born is to continue the procreative cycle. But it is surely a tautology to say that one must be born in order to be a candidate for living. I take my suggestion that fellowship with God and each other is the *telos* of marriage to be another way of expressing the truth the Evangelist teaches in recounting the story of Nicodemus and Jesus (John 3:1-17), which is the same truth we celebrate when we say in

funerals that "life has changed, not ended." It is true that being born is important, but being born is not the same as living. "You must be born from above." By which Jesus teaches that being alive, while instrumentally caused by childbirth, does not consist of having a heartbeat, but of having a relation of reconciled fellowship with God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. And, at least for the Christian form, that fellowship is the *telos* of marriage.

Importantly, marriage is distinguished from the procreative function by its manifestation as an *oikos* (household), a concept denoting an ongoing context of sharing the fundamentals that sustain life such as food, shelter, protection from predators, and the sociality through which language becomes generative of tools. And it is the *oikos*, probabilistically renewed through the divine blessing and secondary instrumental cause of procreativity, through which creatures participate most fundamentally in the *oikonomia*, the economy of redemption. Procreativity is an instrumental means, and not the end, of an *oikos*, and an *oikos* is an instrumental means, and not the end, of the *oikonomia* through which all creatures participate in our Creator.

The couple themselves create an instance of the category, marriage, as in ages past, by virtue of their 'vows' of ongoing commitment to one another. In our ongoing ecclesial conversation about human sexuality, we've documented a plenitude of forms of marriage vows. There is a great diversity in the content of the vows which create marriage, some of them featuring lifelong committed relationship and some of them featuring caricatures of love and fellowship. All are marriage. Not all are rational in the sense of manifesting the good of enduring exclusive monogamous *oikos* through which God sustains us.

We rightly lament the brokenness that pervades our nation's conceptions of marriage. Yet we err if we claim that the Scriptural witness identifies the rightly ordered *oikos* with the procreative family unit. As Karl Barth points out:

> When the New Testament speaks of a "house," it means the *familia* in the comprehensive sense of a household fellowship which can become a centre of the message heard and reproduced in the wider life of the community. **It does not denote the clan as such**.... It was the habits of thought and actual customs of the Christianised heathen which later gave to the idea of the family the splendour of a fundamental concept of Christian ethics (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, 242, emphasis added).

So What Does It Mean to Bless a Marriage?

Just as the presbyter's blessing does not create the marriage, nor does it make that marriage holy. Our rite of marriage is first of all a celebratory thanksgiving to God for our community's receipt of a new instance of the divine gift of marriage. As in ordination, we name our communal experience that, when we set apart persons for the *vocation* of Christian marriage, God's life-giving action has met us in their faithful ministry as married persons in our midst. Moreover, we petition God to meet us as we gaze upon and support

and participate in this particular instance of marriage. The blessing of a Christian marriage causes no change, but is a prayer that, as in ages past, God will draw near as we enjoy the ministry of the married couple to the extent their common life aligns with God's life-giving purpose.

And what is the distinctive ministry we pray will emerge in Christian marriage? Answering that will require much more unpacking.

Let me anticipate my detailed treatment below by letting Barth guide us on this. In addition to their exclusive, monogamous *oikos* becoming a primary locus of bread-sharing, shelter, protection from predators, and the sociality through which we receive the gift of language - normative attributes for all marriages in the created order - our faith and hope is that their cruciform *oikos* "will become a centre of the message heard and reproduced in the wider life of the [eucharistic] community." Our prayer is that God will sustain our community by making their home a sanctuary of love in which God's nourishing presence is made visible.

On the Meaning of Words and Other Puzzles

A child was allowed to play daily in a room filled with 100 balls. Ninety-seven percent of them were green. Due to the fact that he did not always have the visibility or attentiveness skills to notice that some balls weren't green, the other 3% did not register in his consciousness. Each day, his teacher would lift up the ball and say, "Let's play ball." One day, however, the room was filled with new red balls. The teacher lifted one of them and said, "Let's play ball." The child argued, and eventually began to cry, saying, "No, not ball." For he knew that what made a ball a ball was its greenness.

Grandpa tried to soothe his teenage granddaughter who was lamenting her profound sense of loss because her beloved elder brother had moved to a far-off city for college. Trying to help, he said, "Why don't I buy you a plane ticket? Your brother can meet you at the airport, and the two of you can hook up at your hotel?" His granddaughter looked at him, her face quickly evincing horror, embarrassment, and then mirth. Later that night, his middle-aged daughter explained to Grandpa that, especially for the new generation, "hook up" now describes an entirely different action.

In Wittgensteinian fashion, I suggest that at least *part* of the way to a new theology of marriage entails recognizing we have a classic communal language problem. Throughout the history of our ecclesial practical reasoning and practice (and the moral reasoning and lexicon of our particular culture), we have lifted up heterosexual households and said, "Let's celebrate a marriage." Procreativity so dominates historical experience of such households that we know that what makes a marriage a marriage is its categorical openness to procreation. In our time, two people stand before us with a different sort of thing and say, "Let's celebrate a marriage." Our cognitive dissonance is understandable. In our communal moral reasoning, a concept we received as a given now means something else.

Is this a new revelation?

How are we to think of this?

I've heard it said - from folks on both sides of the issue - that the Holy Spirit has given us a new *revelation* regarding human sexuality. Some believe that is the correct grammar to describe what has happened, and others use that explanation as a way of expressing their skepticism.

I don't believe describing the change in our conception as new revelation is helpful or accurate. It seems more fruitful to declare that we have embraced a new hypothesis regarding the concept of marriage. The content of revelation with regard to human anthropology and marriage has not changed, but our understanding of it has evolved.

This way of describing the change reflects an Aristotelian or scientific way of thinking about how we come to know what we know. As I argued elsewhere in appropriating Richard Hooker's arguments against certain Puritan claims, our doctrines are always approximations of the Eternal Law revealed. Due to our finitude and the blindness of sin, there is always a gap between what the Eternal Law (which is the Living Word) reveals and our comprehension of it. Something is always lost in the transmission, much as we experience losses due to friction, resistance, impedance, and noise in other aspects of life. And so there is always a gap between the Eternal Law and the natural law we create in response to its revelation.

Often our approximations serve us well for a long time. We don't mind if those approximations are rough until such time as the gaps between their results and real world experience get in the way. So, for example, the geocentric cosmology worked just fine for most applications, but folks noticed a gap. Newton filled it with his laws (e.g, Force= Mass x Acceleration of gravity). Newton's algorithm worked just fine for centuries. It sufficed until we needed to understand the universe better and noticed that his approximation failed on the very large scale of interplanetary and stellar movement. So Newton's Laws were replaced with a better algorithm, Einstein's theory of relativity, which takes into account the speed of light, and thereby re-thinks time. But less than a century later, we noticed that Einstein's model breaks down when we look at very small particles. And so we had to adjust the algorithm again, and develop quantum physics. Today, my daughter learns a quite different chemistry and physics than I learned in my teens. She's learning new rules of the game, new concepts with which we approximate the same reality.

In each case, we looked at the same reality and adjusted our concepts. That's how I see what's before us now. Our hypothesis that greenness determines "ball" worked fine until it became evident that our concept no longer fit the data. Our traditional conceptions of human anthropology and marriage worked fine until we recognized that they fail to explain our experience comprehensively. And so, with humility, we set forth a new hypothesis: marriage is exclusive, monogamous, lifelong *oikos,* and "procreation is a contingent result" (Song, Ch 5, Pt 4, Para 1).

For such a claim to be intelligible, we have to be open to the possibility that what makes a marriage a marriage is not its biological possibility but something else. It's not the ball's greenness but its shape. It is not a union's potential fecundity but something else. Something almost always, but not always, *correlative* with potential fecundity. *Oikos*. And therefore Christian marriage is a different, related thing. Not merely *oikos*, but *oikos* reconfigured into an enfleshed cruciform shape for the benefit of the community. Marriage now is something different than before. That's the thread I'll pursue below.

Such a change in the meaning of words, no matter how powerfully desired by our culture or reasonable in our estimation, requires justification to other participants in our communal moral reasoning if it is to be a sustainable change. In what follows, I'll propose what I perceive to be some of the boundaries which logically circumscribe such justification.

Moral Reasoning and Our Ecclesial Grammar

The first thing we should say about what we can say is that we must not say too much. I have in view here two clusters of claims.

Some have justified the Church's blessing of same-sex marriage by arguing that what makes marriage holy is some behavior or relation which is described, in various ways, as *analogous to the inner life of the triune God*. But no such Trinitarian analogy is possible! No analogy of being is possible. For, as a long line from the fourth century to Barth reminds us, we finite beings have no access to the inner life of God. We have no basis, therefore, to speak of an analogy between ourselves and the Trinity.

For the same reason, claims that base marriage's holiness on our human procreative power say too much. Some suggest that, in childbirth within a marital context, there is an analogy between the Creator and the creature. *Pace* my colleagues, while ethical reasoning based on certain kinds of analogy of creation are sustainable, we must be cautious about that particular kind. That is, we say too much if we imply that our creaturely procreativity *corresponds* to the divine creativity, as though the difference is a matter of proportion, or as if we have access enabling us to comprehend the divine creativity and thereby speak positively of an analogy. God is utterly Other. There is no analogy running upward from humankind to God. Such analogies lead us to the precipice of blasphemy.

That said, Christ eternally gives us the gift of himself, the enfleshed Word, so that we know him temporally (John 1:14). The humiliated Christ himself, through the gift of the Spirit, provides the truthful speech by which we speak of the covenant between Father, Son, and Spirit. If there is an analogy, it runs downward, is comprehended through the faith Christ supplies, and it testifies to the covenant of grace through which we creatures are reconciled to our Creator (*analogia fidei*). As we shall see below, the metaphor of the Bridegroom and Bride, whether applied to YHWH and Israel or Christ and Church, is a temporal expression of the covenant of grace, and its analogical relation to covenant marriage epitomizes the *analogia fidei*.

We therefore say too much if we imply, for example, that marriage is the gift whereby God conquers death through our procreative power, for it is singularly Christ's death and resurrection through which death is conquered. We creatures contribute nothing to that. Similarly, we say too much if we speak of an analogy between our procreativity and the divine creativity.

Yet we are on solid ground when we expect to find in marriage a witness to the covenant of grace, which is written temporally on our hearts (Deut 30:6; Rom 2:29, Col 2:11) and performs what it signifies: *reconciliation*. For faith gives us eyes to see the reconciling Word to which *every* created good bears witness (Rom 1:20), and faith creates and sustains the fellowship we describe as covenant. We stand on a firm foundation when we speak of marriage as an exclusive, reconciling covenant that is itself an analogy to the temporally expressed covenant of grace.

Radner's commentary on Leviticus provides clues about how we might think about what makes a marriage holy. There we discovered that holiness is not a quality or an attribute, but a "description of how God in fact temporally wills to act with respect to his creation, by coming to it with his whole being." Holiness is about God's selfcoming, and therefore holiness is not something that we can make our possession or put under our control, and not something we can bring about.

In other words, as soon as we begin to speak about what makes a thing holy, we enter the domain of revelation. That means that holiness describes *not a persistent state* of a thing but a communal memory of encounters with the Word, encounters in which we bring nothing whatsoever but the faith God supplies, encounters in which whatever knowledge we have is shaped by God so that it conforms to God's self-knowledge. God draws near, and we are touched, yet remain unchanged. Unchanged, that is, except that, in the encounter, we discover ourselves addressed by Jesus Christ, and, over the course of a history of such encounters, transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-2). To say a thing is holy, in other words, is to mark the location where we have repeatedly drunk of the Living Water so that other travelers might satiate their thirst, too. Which is to say that holiness describes the spaces in our lives where we can confidently expect the Real Presence of Jesus Christ to engage us. As we sing with the heavenly host, "*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*." Where charity and love are, God is there.

When we try to describe what does or does not constitute holy marriage, therefore, we err if we begin with the premise that we even have the capacity to point to something *we* do that *causes* its holiness. We err if we search for an analogy of being that finds within ourselves a sign of the inner life of the triune God. We err if we assert an analogy of creation (such as traditionalist's reflections on childbirth) and suggest that marriage is rightly ordered when and only when marriage is biologically open to procreative possibility. We err not just because in both of these we say too much, but also because these searches for analogies are efforts to name a correspondence between our actions and God's which renders the divine selfcoming a predicate of ourselves as subjects.

That said, we can boldly name marriage as a space of holiness, provided our confidence arises from our faith that Christ himself creates covenant partnerships through which the Spirit turns water into wine and thereby prefigures the Eucharistic assembly which itself manifests the covenant of grace (John 2:1-12). We have reason to expect marriage to be holy but do not ourselves cause it to be so. The most we can say about what does or does not constitute holy marriage is to describe what we observe within particular forms of marriage that seem historically to be correlative with the gentle pressure we recognize as the Real Presence in our midst. The most we can do is proclaim our rational hope that when we repeat those practices, there too will we draw near the place where God draws near.

Imagining a Theology of Marriage

To say that marriage is holy is to say that marriage is such a space. A theology of marriage, then, must explain why we are justified in our hope that we as a community will encounter the real presence of the Christ when we gaze upon a couple during the moments they conform to their wedding vows. How could marriage become such a space?

Our forebears named several Scriptural texts that may guide us, and many of them have been so important to our understanding that they form something of a canon with respect to Christian reflection on marriage. We could look to any of the texts suggested in support of the marriage rite in *The Book of Common Prayer*, but I think it is sufficient for my purposes to look at only two of the deuteroPauline texts: Ephesians 5:15-33 and Colossians 3:12-17.

Ephesians 5:15-33

Many turn quickly to Eph. 5:31-32 when trying to understand what marriage is. Perhaps it is the fact that we discover the word μυστήριον there and we want to explain in what way marriage might be a mystery. The more helpful verse, I think, is v21. "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." I draw two inferences from this teaching.

First, let me suggest that, with N.T. Wright, I believe vv15-20 are part of this pericope, providing important clues to interpretation. They suggest to me that, in the background of Paul's letter, is an implicit engagement with one of the more popular religio-philosophical orders in Greco-Roman times, the cult of Dionysus. I think the entire pericope (vv15-33) serves, whether intentionally or not, as an antidote to the Dionysian worldview, which, in our time, means it also provides an antidote to the Nietzschean nihilism that pervades much of Western secular humanism. In particular, the Dionysian worldview exalted power and violence and the annihilation of difference. The author of Ephesians presents an alternative worldview.

"Be subject one another" is a fascinating phrase, especially in light of its cultural context. Certainly it is a call to be servants to one another (John 13). But to be subject to one another means that I am to see and move towards the other as a *subject* capable of acting

upon me. I offer myself as an object upon which she can act. In other words, I see her not as an *object*, but as God sees her, and as God has declared her on the Cross. In contrast with the Dionysian worldview, in contrast with the honor-shame structure of society, whenever I look at the other, I am to see her as a person capable of addressing me authoritatively, a person who has the same status as me while remaining distinctive. Relational reciprocity. In context, this is a reconfiguration of *oikos*. It is not about sex. It is about relationship. It is to manifest reconciliation.

Moreover, I am to see and move towards the other in this way "out of reverence to Christ." Implicitly, I *could* see her as something other than a subject. But because I look upon Christ as my Lord, I am to manifest reconciliation with them. Concretely. On a daily basis. "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." We could find no more pithy summary of Paul's instruction to Philemon explaining why he must liberate Onesimus.

By my reading, what Ephesians teaches us about marriage has little to do with procreation. Rather, it teaches that exclusive, monogamous *oikos*, reconfigured so that it corresponds to God's act of reconciliation on the Cross, looks like a reciprocal ongoing self-offering that maintains difference while manifesting unity. And, importantly, the cause of this reconfigured *oikos* is not internal to us. Rather, the epistemic ground of our action of being subject to one another is none other than our recognition of Christ's self-offering that maintains the Creator's difference from us while re-creating unity. There is no intrinsic analogy. Rather, we recognize Christ as Lord and *imitate* him in our particularity. And, as Paul stresses repeatedly and as I have argued elsewhere, such mimesis is the means by which the character productive of virtue is formed.

Ephesians 5:31-32

With this understanding of reconfigured marriage established, the author pivots, noting that the phenomenon of marriage and the phenomenon of Christ and Church are related to each other. This is where Augustine and many other commentators on marriage focus, perhaps because the word μυστήριον appears here. Many focus on the sexual union in explaining the mystery.

But the mystery is not that the two become one flesh, unless Paul is using μυστήριον in a way inconsistent with the rest of his corpus. Nor is the mystery that Christ and Church are related. As TJ Lang notes, "The mystery is what emerges when the two are superimposed, which is to say, the mystery is that Christ and the church, like the man and woman of Gen 2, have also become a singular body" (TJ Lang, *Mystery and the Making of a Christian Historical Consciousness*, PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2014, 148).

So what is being claimed? Just as the flood and Red Sea deliverance prefigured the mystery, so too, one of the most common created goods we experience also prefigures the mystery: "… for the author of Eph 5:32 at least, Gen 2:24 can be read as prefiguring Christ and the church because the new reality revealed by Christ has created this new hermeneutical possibility" (Lang, 141). And what is the mystery? The mystery is neither that the two become one flesh nor that Christ and Church are related as one. After

reviewing Christian usage of μυστήριον in the Pauline and DeuteroPauline letters, and then in the works of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Melito, and Tertullian, Lang concludes that the mystery schema of revelation is "straightforward:"

> God pretemporally established a plan for humanity, but this plan was concealed from humanity. Yet now, through the advent of Christ and Christian proclamation, this eternal arrangement—this mystery—has been disclosed to the world.

If vv 31-32 help us to understand marriage, perhaps the most important thing they say is this: when we gaze upon a couple in the moments they honor their vows, this mystery is prefigured. That is, we encounter reconciliation between the two which manifests God's reconciling purpose on the Cross. But of course the author had already established that in the preceding verses.

In my view, the author's meaning goes in the direction of and serves as a commentary on the mission of Christ's Church. The author uses analogical language intended to explain the startling gospel which is now revealed. Notice that the relation does not violate the 'rules of ecclesial grammar' I've proposed: the comparison is of a common temporal relationship to the temporal expression of the covenant of grace between the Church and its head in order to understand something about the latter. Human nature is not compared to the divine nature, and human action is not described as proportional to divine action. Rather one created good (marriage) is compared to another created good (the temporally manifested relation between Christ and the Church). Just as A:B, so too X:Y. As Barth suggests, perhaps two reconciliation events are in view here. Just as, in marriage, female is reconciled to her opposite, male, so too the creature, through the Cross, is reconciled to his opposite, Creator.

We need not read "the two become one flesh" as pointing to the sex act. Indeed, the phrase is a metaphor for the whole of marriage, which, as noted above, is characterized among certain sexed creatures not by procreativity (which is statistically correlative), but by the establishment of an exclusive, monogamous household. So the text can be read as saying, "Just as, in the establishment of an *oikos*, female is reconciled to her opposite, male, so too the creature, through the Cross, is reconciled to his opposite, Creator." *Oikos* prefigures *oikonomia*.

In addition, but not primarily, we also see here an echo of an additional qualification of marriage that was well known in the Old Testament: the criterion of *exclusivity*. This is not developed but apparently assumed in the author's deployment of the bridegroom/bride metaphor with reference to YHWH and Israel so common in Jewish thought. The mutuality and reciprocity in the accounts of rightly ordered marriage we find described positively in Song of Songs and negatively in Hosea, for example, - presuppose that these are *binary* possibilities - at least from the perspective of the bride! Perhaps polygamy is conceivable from the *bridegroom's* perspective, as the Old Testament frequently describes, such as in the case of infertility (e.g, Hagar in Gen. 16). In these verses, however, and certainly in the interpretative tradition (e.g., Augustine) and in the practice of The Episcopal Church, no possible warrant is given for anything other than a binary relationship between two

partners. There can be no confusion for us on this matter: the concept of reconciled *oikos* in view here is of a particular form that necessarily excludes other forms of *oikos* such as polyamorous, polygamous, and incestuous partnerships. The form in view here assumes the partners are borns of different sets of parents and that their moral bond is exclusive, monogamous, and lifelong.

Notice that, from the biological perspective, "Being born is important." But from the New Testament perspective, being alive is constituted not merely by biology, but by abiding in reconciled fellowship with God, which necessarily includes reconciled fellowship with those God loves (John 3:1-17, 15, 17). So what is it that most fittingly corresponds to Christ's action on the Cross? Not procreation, but reconciliation. And, to check this conclusion, if we step back and look at the entire Pauline corpus, I suggest we'll see that *reconciliation* is overwhelmingly the dominant theme.

Colossians 3:12-17

I think we find a similar teaching in another classic wedding text, Colossians 3:12-17. Immediately prior to this (v11), the author exegetes creation eschatologically, just as when describing the effects of baptism in Gal 3:26-30, "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" This sets up another description of reconfigured *oikos*. Verse 13 is key: "As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other." Just as in Matthew 18 and elsewhere, the essential practice which makes possible the relational reciprocity corresponding to God's action on the Cross is *forgiveness*. But again, the epistemic ground of our act of forgiving is not within ourselves. Rather, the epistemic ground is our remembering. "Do this in remembrance of me." Our *recollection* of God's gracious action on the Cross powers our corresponding action. We *imitate*. "As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other." And, as noted above and argued elsewhere, such imitation of Christ is the means by which Jesus schools us, cultivating in us the fruits of the Spirit Paul describes throughout his corpus.

This brief survey of two of our classic wedding texts leads me to suggest that the mystery hidden but now revealed in marriage is not something unique to marriage to which we can point and say, "That's what makes marriage holy." Rather, the mystery is, as Paul, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and many since have understood it: through the humiliated and exalted Christ and the fellowship the Spirit creates, God is acting to reconcile creation. Reconciliation enacted as reverence for Christ - manifest and proclaimed, is the key. Not childbirth.

What about Sex?

To suggest that the *telos* of a marriage is not procreation but rather that procreation is a secondary instrumental cause of marriage brings us eventually to the question of sex. For if I am right, then what are the goods of sex? Clearly and importantly, one of those goods is procreation. But are there others?

For Barth, real sex is always an act of reconciliation. The unreconciled sex act - sex in which two humans are not subjects to one another in response to grace - dehumanizes.

Rowan Williams, in his famous "Body of Grace" essay, and Robert Song, in his *Covenant and Calling,* turn to John Paul II to consider this question. John Paul II, in reflecting on contraception, speaks not just of the procreative fruit of sex but of a unitive end. His argument against contraception is that it violates and denies the "unitive end of embodying and fostering the couple's love" (Song, Ch 3, Pt 3, Para 14). Song notes, "if one concedes that contraception is justifiable, one also concedes that sex is characterized by a good which is independent of and additional to its orientation to procreation" (Ch 3, Pt 3, Para 16). Song continues:

> To then accept that contraception is in principle legitimate is to admit that sex may have, intrinsically and objectively and not just in the choices or willings of the partners, a different and separable meaning from procreativity. And this in turn implies that covenant partnerships, whether heterosexual or homosexual, may be sexual in nature (Ch 3, Pt 3, Para 16).

So What Constitutes Holy Marriage?

So what can we conclude about what makes marriage holy?

The first thing is that it seems, as always, that the exalted Christ has historically done something marvelous with the most ordinary of things - the exclusive, committed, and lifelong constitution of a household that we discover not just throughout humankind but also in many classes of sexed creatures. It is important to notice the ordinariness of marriage, for that helps us to see that this enfleshed ordinary relationship is what inoculates Christian marriage from the perils of Gnosticism or Marcionism, and not procreativity. It is so ordinary that even geese and swans and angelfish and gibbons and turtle doves and wolves and bald eagles seem to marry.

In responding to Gnostic heresy, Irenaeus emphasized Christ's action through the most ordinary of things. The ordinary bread and ordinary cup are symbols of the abundance in creation that Christ the Creator provides. Thus, the Eucharist celebrates the providential grace of the Creator God, the Father, who, through his sun and rain, sustains all life and all that is. When the cup and loaf of creation are consecrated in the presence of the Spirit who enables proclamation of the word of God, true participation in the life of God is possible. In the same way, the ordinariness of marriage proclaims that matter matters.

The second thing is that there seems to be a particular form of marriage to which we can repeatedly return with the rational and bold hope that, as we draw near to it, Christ will draw near to us. When the Eucharistic assembly sets apart a couple for the vocation of Christian marriage who publicly bind themselves to one another in covenant, using words like those in *The Book of Common Prayer*, we create the skeleton of that form.

But it is in the bread-sharing of daily life that the form becomes enfleshed. The epistemic ground of holy marriage is our knowledge of and trust in God's pretemporal decision to be with us because of who God is and not because of who we are. In the moments that one spouse, in response to such unmerited grace, offers himself to God as a channel through which God may bless the other whom God adores, and makes such self-offering out of reverence to Christ, and not on the basis of who the other is or may become, then God's reconciling action on the Cross is manifest. The mystery of the divine *oikonomia* is revealed as it is manifest in the *oikos*. Through mimesis, and not analogy, Christ is made visible in the marriage. And as we witness such moments in faith, we have cause to hope that, as we draw near to them, we will encounter the gentle pressure of the divine selfcoming, drawing us more deeply into God's reconciling love. Because of our history with God and each other, to the extent that such moments are actualized, we rightly declare marriage holy.

Marriage as Covenant Partnership

For many centuries, marriage has had a relatively stable meaning roughly denoting unions with procreative possibility. Imagining a theology of marriage which incorporates forms that are not potentially procreative (which includes both heterosexual and same-sex unions) will require a new definition of marriage.

The exclusive, monogamous, lifelong, reconciled *oikos* I've imagined maps fairly well to Robert Song's account of "Covenant Partnership" in his *Covenant and Calling*. At this point I'd like to emphasize three qualifications to make this correlation explicit.

Song describes three characteristics of such relationships, and I've already introduced the first two in my re-imagined form of Christian marriage. His first characteristic is *faithfulness*, by which he denotes both the exclusivity and monogamy criteria I've assumed and also the mutual self-offering grounded in Christ that I described above. I've also anticipated his second characteristic, *permanence*, with my "lifelong" qualifier. His description is worth noting: "Second, they would embody a commitment to permanence. Just as God, despite his anger at Israel's unfaithfulness, repeatedly commits himself to them, so covenant partnerships would be constituted and sustained by mutual commitments of the partners to each other until death did them part" (Song, Ch 2, Pt 3, Para 4).

So far, I've only alluded to Song's third category, fruitfulness. As most authors involved in this conversation have emphasized, the tradition has historically described the fruitfulness criterion in terms of children, virtues, and new Christians. Importantly, Song does not just abstractly assert that marriage includes non-procreative as well as procreative relationships. Rather, he reminds us that this move is grounded theologically in the fact that procreation is not part of life in the resurrection: human relationships in this life continue to testify to God's covenant love for us as permanent and exclusive, but after Christ need not be procreative. In my view, Song properly exegetes creation eschatologically. Accordingly, Song proposes a more expansive concept of the fruitfulness criterion:

> Third, instead of biological procreativity, they would be characterized by other forms of fruitfulness. Since such relationships are eschatologically grounded, they would take their orientation from the demands of the Kingdom. In line with Paul's aspirations in 1 Corinthians 7, they would be freed to be anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; they could not be self-enclosed or self-satisfied, but would be open to the call of charity beyond themselves. Echoing in the new eschatological context God's original declaration about Adam that it is not good for human beings to be alone, their relationship would enable each to be a helper to the other, making possible a degree of fruitfulness in the service of the Kingdom that might not have been possible for them as individuals separately (Song, Ch 2, Pt 3, Para 4).

With these additions, I take what I've called reconciled *oikos* to map to what Song dubs "covenant partnerships." Such unions incorporate both potentially procreative heterosexual marriages as well as manifold forms of both heterosexual and same-sex unions. Like Song, I believe movement towards such unions requires a doctrinal change, for we would now define marriage *as* covenant partnership. I think he describes this doctrinal change well, so I'll commend his words:

> Might it be that after the birth of Christ covenant partnership is the deeper and more embracing category, with procreative marriage now being the special case? Rather than placing them as two different vocations side by side, might in fact marriage be subsumed under covenant partnership, such that procreation was a contingent result of marriage? All covenant partnerships would be characterized by faithfulness, permanence and fruitfulness, but in some cases that fruitfulness would take the specific form of children from within the couple's sexual relationship, in other cases it would take the form of any number of kinds of works of charity, including not least adoption and fostering….
>
> There are many attractions to this approach. It would give a unified theological account of marriage and covenant partnership, bringing out the subterranean connections between the two, and also showing how a creation ordinance is taken up and fulfilled eschatologically without losing its grounding in creation. It would make clear that marriages are always between equals: same-sex covenant partnerships cannot be understood as unions hierarchically ordered by gender and so the claim that marriage itself would necessarily be between equals would be fundamentally confirmed. It would revivify the Christian understanding that marriages are always for something beyond themselves, not just for the personal fulfilment of the couple. Just as we saw that covenant partnerships must always be characterized by fruitfulness in doing the works of the Lord so as to avoid the dangers of an égoisme à deux, so we would understand that procreative marriages are also always oriented to procreation as a species of fruitfulness and therefore oriented beyond themselves….

> The witness of the Christian Church in marriage would then clearly be demarcated not as a paean to the nuclear family, let alone to patriarchal models of marriage, but rather to the avoidance of self-centred and consumerist models of marriage and family. Marriage enriches society and strengthens community, yet it does so not by raising new generations of consumers, but by nurturing people who are capable of love….

Conclusions

So given these musings, what conclusions do I draw?

First, it seems clear to me that it is indeed possible for us to imagine a theology of marriage that incorporates all the data - not just potentially procreative unions, but also non-procreative heterosexual and homosexual unions. I've sketched here the skeleton of what I think such a theology would entail.

I accept that the Task Force Response may be sufficient as a report to General Convention, which is what the authors intended. But my sense is that the Task Force Report is only the first step; that is, it is insufficiently robust if it is to undergird our ecclesial practice and serve as our explanation to the communion of saints - both synchronically and diachronically - of why we have chosen to diverge from the dominant historical teaching and embrace a new hypothesis about what constitutes marriage.

I take that hypothesis to require a reconfiguration of our concept of marriage to be what Song calls a covenanted partnership. It seems to me that such a reconfiguration is recognizable as a substantive change in the teaching of The Episcopal Church, and therefore requires the due process our tradition and canons require when we make such change.

I must confess that in all of these musings, I have been troubled by one remaining worry. And that is that we may lose something we rightly treasure if we do not tread carefully. I hinted at this concern in my allusion in my discussion of Ephesians: I wonder about the extent to which a Dionysian nihilism pervades our society and potentially clouds our thinking. Nihilism leads to the annihilation of difference, yet we are called to recognize diversity as the abundance through which God blesses us. We are to receive the other as gift. I wonder about the extent to which we unintentionally annihilate the difference between male and female - understood as sexed creatures and not as gender constructions. And I wonder about the possibility of our losing the sense of both homosexuality and heterosexuality as gifts if we treat their partnerships as identical. I see both of these as real risks, and we ought to be clear about how we will mitigate them before moving forward.

Because of these concerns, at the conclusion of my musings, I wrote to the secretary of the Task Force, Tobias Haller, and asked him how the Task Force had wrestled with them. With his permission, I share his response, preceded by my framing of the question:

Dear Tobias,

Did the Task Force discuss any options for maintaining the importance of difference? I mean by that the difference between male and female, and the difference between heterosexual and homosexual persons? That's the part that troubles me and I know many who are planning to vote against the proposed changes. In my case, I am sensitive to the commoditization of persons that happens in the nihilism that pervades our culture. So we suppress difference or we claim that we are *merely* different, and that our differences do not and ought not matter. But theologically that strikes me - and Rowan persuaded me of this - as the opposite of Christian charity. O'Donovan makes this point, too. If homosexuality is a created good, then it seems to be my task to struggle to receive that difference as a gift, and in the recognition of difference and reconciliation with difference Christ is manifest. So my struggle is to twofold: **how do we name same-sex marriage as blessing that is not merely different but thankfully different, a distinctive vocation, and how do we do that in such a way that does not create a hierarchy of forms, with heterosexual marriage in a higher place?** Can you help me with this? How did the group wrestle with this, if it did? How do you think about it?

Dear Craig,

Interesting questions. I don't recall this coming up as you frame it, which is more generous than some of the rhetoric that emphasizes difference more or less precisely so as to wall off marriage from same-sex union as unique (and superior).

But this is a larger issue, I think, and it bears some close examination. I do think difference is of ultimate importance, but at the level of each individual entity being different to all other entities -- not focusing on genera or species but on the unique character of every created thing. We need to ask why, if union is the goal, did God create difference to begin with: and I think the answer is in Genesis and Ephesians, that union is not the same thing as solitude, and is in fact the remedy for it. In the meantime "all creation groans" even in its particularity, for the ultimate union that doesn't do away with difference, but embraces it.

So I'm resistant to a focus on the generic difference between same-sex and mixed sex couples, and rather affirm both that each couple is unique and different to all other couples, and that the genera are ultimately subsumed in the union in which there is no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female: the point being, I think, not that a particular Jew ceases to be a Jew, or a Greek a Greek, or a man a man, but that these generic differences cease to have any significance when compared with the "Christ-like-ness" shining through each and illuminating all.

As well it should if we are to treat every person as made in the image of God, in whom there are no "parts" or divisions or differences.

What Should We Do?

In my view:

- General Convention should consider the Task Force Report very carefully, recognizing that it was not produced as the robust account of a new theology of marriage that it is our responsibility to give if we embrace a new hypothesis of what defines marriage. The task of providing such an account remains before us. There is more work to be done.
- The theology of marriage we produce should undergird our practice of blessing marriages so that future generations will know what we think we are doing as we name certain forms of marriage as holy and exclude other forms.
- The General Convention should as explicitly as possible answer the two questions I asked above. **Given** the re-definition of marriage as a covenant partnership:

1. **How do we ensure we continue to name maleness and femaleness as distinctive blessings that are not merely different but thankfully different, and how do we do that in such a way that does not create a hierarchy of forms, with either male nor female in a higher place?**
2. **How do we begin to name same-sex marriage as a blessing that is not merely different but thankfully different, a distinctive vocation, and how do we do that in such a way that does not create a hierarchy of forms, with heterosexual marriage in a higher place?**

Very respectfully submitted,
Craig D. Uffman, PhD