

Does regarding marriage as a sacrament offer new insights into the Church's current debates surrounding gay marriage?

Introduction

In this paper I wish to outline a theology for regarding marriage as a sacrament, a genuine “sign of sacred reality” (Augustine) which participates in the love of Christ for his Church and, more profoundly still, in the self-giving love of the Trinitarian Persons. Having outlined this argument in the specific case of heterosexual marriage, I proceed in the final section to discuss whether the sacramental theory proposed could apply as a legitimating basis for homosexual union. The paper falls into three main sections. First, I explore briefly the rather shadowy emergence of Christian marriage from being a contractual purchase to becoming recognised as a full sacrament of the medieval western church, only to be rejected by the reformers, primarily due to the reformers’ demotion of all rites not specifically ordained by Christ. Secondly, I shall argue from John’s gospel and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, that marriage represents Christ’s self-giving love for the Church, an insight which medieval theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and more recent thinkers such as Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) moreover regard as participation in eternal Trinitarian relations. Finally I shall attempt to explore whether the overarching paradigm of mutual self-giving love could be translated into a theology and liturgy for gay marriage, basing my assessment upon the two sharply divergent sides of the theological debate in which North American Anglicans have recently been engaged.

An uncertain sacrament?

In common with many other reformed churches, Anglicanism limits the term ‘sacrament’ to the dominical rites of Baptism and Eucharist, whilst Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox affirm five others – Confirmation, Penance (sacrament of reconciliation), Ordination, Marriage and Anointing (Unction). Yet whilst the reformers repudiated marriage’s sacramental status, it hardly had a distinguished pedigree within Catholicism, becoming recognised as a sacrament only through Peter Lombard’s enumeration of a sevenfold sacramental system in the mid twelfth century. Patristic writers – themselves largely unmarried and keen to commend virginity – said little to defend marriage and some even voiced some ambivalence or negativity. Such attitudes became even harder to challenge in the wake of Augustine’s pervasive and damaging revulsion for sex and the impassioned human body as sin-mired snares which may perilously reorient human longings away from God – the true end of all desire – towards lesser, self-destructive

trifles, disordered and disordering preoccupations which may, by extension, undermine and unravel godly, charitable society. So whilst recognising that marriage was a valuable social institution which preserved disciplined communities and ensured the perpetuation of the human race and despite believing that marriage was a genuine *sacramentum* (see below), Augustine's theology remains disturbingly overshadowed by his insistence that the original sin of Adam and Eve is transmitted through sexual intercourse, hampering significantly any affirmative theology of marriage and sexual union based upon his teaching. Indeed for many centuries (some would say even until the present day) his disdainful attitude held a powerful sway over the western church's understanding of sex and relationships. For much of the period prior to its inclusion within Lombard's sevenfold sacramental system, marriage in the western church was understood merely as a contractual union forged through mutual consent between two Christians requiring no ecclesiastical rite. Only gradually and in piecemeal fashion did clerical involvement in the rite grow. Following Constantine, priests and bishops were sometimes invited to marriage feasts and were asked to bless the couple once the family rites were concluded or even days later during the eucharistic celebration.¹ Although by 400 AD all *clerics* were required to have their marriages solemnized by a priest, this was not extended to the laity until much later. Following the fall of the Roman Empire bishops took increasing responsibility in making pronouncements within marriage disputes and in developing laws for deciding when familial ties barred a couple from marriage. Yet marriages remained essentially as property agreements as the groom purchased his wife from her father or guardian, accompanied by written agreement and the mutual exchange of gifts, to be followed by a wedding feast and consummation of the marriage in a specially prepared nuptial chamber.² Clergy might be present at the wedding as guests and *might* offer a blessing either during or after the ceremony, yet ecclesiastical involvement often remained marginal. Indeed, Charlemagne's attempts to augment the importance of the (entirely optional) priestly blessing had little effect. Only in the eleventh century did it become common to hold the wedding near a church so that the newly married couple could then obtain the priest's blessing immediately, a custom which eventually developed into a celebration of the wedding ceremony at the church door, followed by a full nuptial mass in church.³

1 See Joseph Martos, 1981, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Christian Church*, London: SCM Press, p. 415.

2 Martos, p. 420.

3 Ecclesiastical influence on marriage developed similarly slowly in the eastern church. Late in the fourth century in certain parts of the east it became customary to have a priestly or episcopal blessing, whilst weddings in Greece and Asia Minor from the fifth century included a symbolic priestly action of joining hands and / or draping a garland over them. Only gradually did marriage in the east develop into a proper liturgical rite requiring priestly blessing and taking place in a church (rather than at home), becoming common by the eighth century and recognised by civil

Nevertheless, by the mid twelfth century, the French church had developed a full Christian rite for marriage which in many ways resembled other rites deemed by Peter Lombard to be sacramentals. So whilst other influential figures such as Francis Gratian devoted energy in attempting to gather together the somewhat disparate marriage teaching and pronouncements of popes and bishops stretching back to the period of the Fathers, Lombard's *Sentences* took a strikingly theological approach in treating marriage – somewhat contentiously – within the section on the sacraments. Yet this did not occur not without considerable difficulty, as Martos recounts.⁴ First of all, whilst marriage was indeed as sign of something sacred it could not be regarded, unlike the other six sacraments, as a *cause of grace*, thereby according it a somewhat second-rate status. Such ambiguity was intensified by the ever-present accompaniment of the exchange of money which undermined any sense that marriage represented a demonstration of undeserved divine grace. Moreover, given its origin as an ancient rite established well before Christ it could hardly be portrayed as an exclusively Christian innovation. In addition, the rather ambivalent teaching on marriage found in St. Paul alongside the often negative attitudes to the body and to sex inherited from Augustine and many of the other fathers seemed to challenge marriage's sacramental aspirations. Indeed, the legal requirement for consummatory intercourse – even if undertaken solely through desire for children rather than from what the Fathers would deem disordered physical passions – seemed to enmesh marriage in the very act which Augustine had portrayed as sin-transmitting. Yet as Martos explains, the Church's confrontation with the southern French sect of the Albigensians inadvertently served to depict marriage more positively.⁵ For whilst the Albigensians regarded matter as evil and thereby condemned marriage for it was rooted in the physical act of procreation which generated more matter, the Church increasingly emphasised child-yielding sexual intercourse as a positive good. Moreover, as the Albigensians derided ecclesiastical ritual as worthless, the Church developed a distinctive nuptial liturgy which implicitly blessed procreative sexual union within marriage. Furthermore, Augustine's teaching on marriage as *sacramentum* gave grounds to regard marriage as a rite akin to baptism and the Eucharist. Augustine believed that marriage had an inherent sacramental quality as a pledge of fidelity between husband and wife, binding them indissolubly together until death, a bond which symbolized Christ's union with the church. Yet the medieval Scholastics remained divided as to what constituted the *sacramentum* – the visible sacramental sign – precisely. Were it to be understood as the priestly blessing then this would invalidate countless marriages – such as those of previous centuries – which lacked such benediction. On the other

authorities as legitimate. See Martos, p. 413.

⁴ Martos, p. 428.

⁵ Martos, p. 429f.

hand, seeing consummatory sexual intercourse as the key sign would, in contemporaneous thought, wrongly elevate an act still regarded by some as venially sinful (even in marriage and for procreative purposes) to an inappropriate sacramental status. Eventually, however, the canon lawyers prevailed, prescribing the mutual consent made by bride and groom during the ceremony as the sacramental sign, thereby containing the *sacramentum* conveniently within the rite itself. Moreover, the *sacramentum et res* – the sacred sign and the reality it conveyed – came to be understood both as the tangible, legally-binding marriage contract as well as the hidden, metaphysical joining of two human souls, mirroring the unbreakable union of Christ and his Church. Such indissoluble metaphysical union, rooted in Christ's own indubitable, humanly irreversible, action, strengthened calls for proscribing divorce, regarding it as theologically impossible, a standard to which the Roman Catholic Church still adheres.

Under Augustine's dominant teaching that copulation transmits Adam's original sin, many theologians still regarded sex as anchoring the sacrament to a physical act that, even when understood as a necessary procreative event, possessed somewhat dubious credentials. Moreover, they continued to struggle to reconcile notions of marriage as a sacrament with the belief that sacraments inherently convey grace. Hence, some theologians during the period immediately following the declaration of marriage's sacramental status regarded the grace bestowed in negative terms, namely the mere avoidance of sin committed through illicit intercourse rather than any sense that marriage might aid progression in holiness. The sacramental theology of St. Thomas Aquinas went further than previous models, however, regarding sacraments as instrumental causes of grace used by God, the efficient cause of grace, to effect *sanctification*: so whereas Augustine had taught that a sacrament is a "sign of a sacred thing" Aquinas posited a "sign of a holy thing so far as it makes men (*sic.*) holy."⁶ Hence, marriage not only imparts the grace of fidelity which enables the man and woman to resist adultery and desertion but more positively also bestows spiritual unity enabling the husband to love and care for his wife as Christ loved the church and likewise for the wife to respect and obey her husband as the Church did (cf. Ephesians 5.25-33). However, reformers such as Martin Luther used this Pauline text precisely to question marriage's status as a sacrament. For whereas the Scholastics, using the Vulgate, had read Ephesians 5.32 as meaning that the joining of man and woman to become one flesh was "a great *sacramentum*" the original Greek talks of a "this great *mystery*" (*to mystērion touto mega*) with nothing to bolster the sevenfold sacramental system of the medieval church.⁷ Hence, Paul's

6 *Summa Theologiae* IIIae, q.60, a.2, *responsio*.

7 Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, translated by A. T. W. Steinhäuser, revised by Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz and reproduced in *Three Treatises* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1960, p. 221.

concern is with the union of Christ with his church, with marriage used merely “as a kind of outward allegory” to illustrate the real mystery of concern; hence the elevation of marriage to the status of “divinely instituted sacrament” exposes human “ignorance of both the word and the thing.”⁸ Other reformers similarly refused to regard marriage – together with all other medieval ‘sacraments’, apart from Baptism and the Eucharist – as sacraments, primarily because, as the Church of England’s 39 Articles of Religions state, they “have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, for that they have not any visible sign of ceremony ordained of God.”⁹ Moreover, whilst the Book of Common Prayer extols marriage as “an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man’s innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee ... commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men”¹⁰, the subsequent sections of the preparation to the marriage service seem less celebratory of the union of man and woman as a good *in and of itself* aside of blessings subsequently bestowed and hazards avoided. The primary reason stated is for the generation of children “brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord...to the praise of his holy Name” and secondly that those lacking “the gift of continency” might, through marrying, possess “a remedy against sin” and “avoid fornication”. Only in the final section does the liturgy stress that the marriage was “ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one might have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.” Moreover, whilst the Book of Common Prayer seems to value the positive blessing of procreation and the avoidance of carnal sin as benefits exceeding the more immediate, tangible joy of marital union, it consciously eschews all sacramental imagery and purposefully avoids any sense of the rite being grace-bestowing, leading its recipients more deeply towards holiness, as Aquinas’s general definition of sacrament had suggested. Moreover, the rite, whilst containing several references to marriage as signifying the union of Christ and the church, is strikingly ‘this worldly’ and provides little by way of a heavenly, eschatological backdrop. Marriage, as the Book of Common Prayer presents it, is clearly for *this* world, is dissolved by death and offers no discernible pattern for our life after death.

Reaffirming marriage as sacrament

8 *Ibid*, p. 223.

9 Article XXV.

10 The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony, 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

In one sense, this classical Anglican reticence is entirely apposite for Christ himself states that marriage is for “those who belong to this age” whilst “those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and the children of God, being children of the resurrection” (Luke 20.34-36). Indeed, the gospels contain no indication whatsoever that Jesus was himself married or the father of children and, moreover, show him relativising the importance of human ties before the far greater and more pressing call of the kingdom: the Galilean fishermen who leave their nets (and their marital / familial commitments) to follow him (Matthew 4.18-22) later discover that their discipleship may entail internal family conflict (Matthew 10.35-36). Moreover, Jesus criticises the one who desires to bury his father rather than being intent on following him (Matthew 8.21-22) whilst also seeming to commend those who “have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19.12), namely those who have deliberately rejected the possibility of marriage for the sake of a greater cause.¹¹ Nevertheless the gospels do contain much positive marriage imagery, the most patent being Jesus’s self-description as the bridegroom whose presence appears to demand feasting rather than fasting (Mark 2.18-20). In so doing Jesus casts himself in a role which Jewish thought had previously ascribed to God himself.¹² John’s Jesus performs his first – entirely extraordinary – sign at the marriage at Cana, producing, in the face of human poverty and inadequacy and from the (hardly celebratory) water filling the stone jars of ritual cleansing, a staggering superabundance of the finest wine. Samuel Wells observes how John’s prologue deliberately mimics the Genesis creation narrative – “in the beginning” (John 1.1; cf. Genesis 1.1) and proceeds to calibrate the calling of the first disciples according to the days of the new creation’s ‘first week’, placing the wedding at Cana at its Sabbath-like climax.¹³ Wells suggests that John’s narrative intentionally echoes salvation history through depicting how Jesus enacts God’s promises heralded in the creation of the world and the call of Israel: as the good wine runs low and eventually disappears, only to be replaced by a superb, plenteous vintage so Jesus is depicted as the long-awaited divine response to Israel’s sorry plight.

11 Writing to the Corinthian church – in which there is clearly an issue with inappropriate sexual relations – St. Paul also expresses a lukewarm attitude to marriage, commending imitation of his own celibate lifestyle as the apparent ideal and marriage only for those “not [practising] self-control... for it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.” (1 Corinthians 7.9).

12 See Peter Waddell, 2012, *Joy: the meaning of the sacraments*, Norwich: The Canterbury Press, p. 149.

13 Samuel Wells, 2005, *God’s Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 18.

“There is good wine. The creation is good; Israel knows peace with its God. The wine runs short. The creation is bent by sin; Israel strays from God’s ways. The wine runs out. Israel is in exile: she has lost land, king, ark, temple. Even after Judah returns from Babylon she has no possession of the land, no king, a temple but no ark. And yet here is Jesus on the third day, offering better wine than ever. Not restoration – resurrection.”¹⁴

John presents us with the story of the divine bridegroom whose coming inspires great rejoicing (John 3.29) but as Israel’s story involved the eventual running dry of the good, divinely-bestowed wine – rejecting God through idolatry and lawlessness that precipitated the crisis of the exile – so Jesus himself faces hostility and is crucified. The good wine has been expended and all there is to quench his thirst is sour wine (John 19.28-29). Yet at that very moment of apparently desolate poverty which John regards as the ultimate revelation of glory – the “hour” which at Cana “[had] not yet come” (John 2.4) – the bridegroom cries out “it is finished” (19.30), or in Latin, consummatus est, a cry replete with “erotic resonances.”¹⁵ At the cross, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1.29), who gives up his life, rather than having it snatched from him (John 10.18), demonstrates the profoundest love possible for his friends (John 15.13; cf. 1 John 4.10). Revelation’s incomparable vision of the once slaughtered, now victorious, lamb approaches its crescendo at the marriage of the Lamb and his bride, an event which provokes rapturous praise, rejoicing and exultation (Revelation 19.6-9). Yet this heavenly marriage and the marriage of those two unnamed, narratively inconspicuous Galileans in Cana testify to essentially the same reality, namely the inexpressible joy of union involving costly, self-giving love. So whilst marriage, as Jesus himself teaches, does not extend beyond death – at least in the sense of the persisting union of this particular man and this particular woman – what it might signify in the light of the divine bridegroom’s extravagant self-expending ‘marriage liturgy’ – from Bethlehem to Golgotha to the new Jerusalem – might indeed survive. In fact, might it be the very stuff of which the new creation is made?

If the 1662 Book of Common Prayer’s description of marriage appears somewhat dour in comparison to the euphoric ‘Johannine’ nuptial vision of both the gospel and revelation and constricts the significance of marriage to an overly ‘this worldly’ portrayal, subsequent Anglican liturgy appears both more celebratory and more expansive in its imagination, for example the blessing of marriage in the Episcopal Church:

“Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. We thank you, also, for consecrating the union of man and woman in his Name. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon this man and this woman. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their heads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”¹⁶

14 Wells, p.19.

15 Waddell, p. 149.

Such language – whilst avoiding the actual term ‘sacrament’- nevertheless expresses a sense of this man and woman being caught up into God’s love, of being sanctified by it and of becoming, as ‘one flesh’, a living sign of that love, continuously transformed until death dissolves their marriage and they participate more fully in “the love that moves the sun and the other stars.”¹⁷ Whilst Anglicans often have an (entirely wholesome and appropriate) sense of ministering potentially to *all* people in a given parish or benefice, Christian marriage is nevertheless understood to involve the union of two *baptized* persons, that is, those who already inhabit what Archbishop William Temple dubbed Christianity’s ‘sacramental universe.’¹⁸ Moreover, even the Book of Common Prayer, whilst rejecting the nuptial mass of medieval Catholicism does state that “it is convenient that new-married persons should receive the holy Communion at the time of their Marriage, or at the first opportunity after their Marriage”¹⁹, thus locating the newly weds’ status within a eucharistic setting which celebrates the self-giving love of Christ. That is, the particular human–human union celebrated in a specific marriage liturgy is, in some sense, set against the expansive human–divine communion that the Eucharist proclaims and ‘performs’, the latter viewed not as some magical, free-standing ritual but as profound, embodied participation in Christ’s once-and-for-all sacrifice.²⁰ Hence, might the marriage vows of a specific bride and groom be seen as seeking to embody (albeit only in a pale, partial, often sin-infected manner) the perfect, self-giving, life-giving love of Christ enacted in the paschal mystery?

Ephesians 5 provides another helpful bridge to set marriage within its proper Christ-centred place, whilst recognising (though not attempting to resolve) the severe (for some, insurmountable) difficulties which 5.22-30 raises in terms of proposing the subjugation of a wife to her husband. I noted above how Luther used the Vulgate’s rather fanciful translation of *mystērion* as *sacramentum* (Ephesians 5.32) to deny marriage its status as a sacrament. Whilst this might – on rather narrow linguistic grounds – destroy, in some Christians’ reckoning, marriage’s sacramental status I would argue that, in the context in which Paul²¹ presents his argument, marriage’s sacramental foundation is actually *enhanced*. Paul makes numerous uses of *mystērion* in many contexts but possibly the most significant is his claim that God’s *mystērion* is Christ himself (Colossians 2.2; cf. 1 Timothy 3.16). Hence if sacraments (still described by the Orthodox as ‘the mysteries’) mediate grace it is precisely the grace of *Christ* that is conveyed, offering, through the very physicality of the sacramental material and action, some participation in his own divine specifically *Trinitarian* – life. In expounding the actual content of a life lived according to the revealed “mystery of [God’s] will set forth in Christ” (Ephesians 1.9) Paul bids the church in Ephesus to embody a new way of life in its myriad relations: “be imitators of

16 *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, according to the use of the Episcopal Church*, 1977 New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation and the Seabury Press, p. 430.

17 Dante, *Paradiso* XXXIII.

18 See John Macquarrie, 1997, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, London: SCM Press.

19 The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony, 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

20 This is made more explicit for Roman Catholics: “it is...fitting that that the spouses should seal their consent to give themselves to the other through the offering of their own lives by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ, they may form but ‘one body’ in Christ” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, London: Geoffrey Chapman, paragraph 1621.

21 For the purposes of my argument I shall assume that Ephesians is genuinely Pauline. In any case, nearly all the theology presented stands even if it is deutero-Pauline.

God as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and *gave himself up for us*, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5.1-2). Given its clear dependence upon Old Testament imagery and theology, Paul appears to suggest that Christ’s fragrant (and therefore well-pleasing) oblation supplants the former sacrifices of animals and grains – that is, the offering of *another* – with a new offering – namely the giving of *self*. It is this self-giving love that is to be the pattern of community life and in particular married life which is to bear the hallmark of Christ who “loved the church and *gave himself up for her*” (Ephesians 5.25). Although Paul enjoins this self-expending vocation upon the husband alone and apparently envisages marriage as a hierarchical, unequal partnership (5.22-24), (probably reflecting, but not challenging, the unbalanced status of men and women in first century society), might we not imagine a theology of marriage predicated upon the *mutual* self-giving love of husband and wife as each seeks to imitate something of Christ’s foundational kenotic love (cf. Philippians 2.5-7), an self-emptying which draws on infinite divine resources and which is never depleted or exhausted? The Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar regards Christ’s self-emptying not merely as an isolated, discrete event of some thirty or so years which culminates in Christ’s “[obedience] to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Philippians 2.8) and his subsequent exaltation and adoration by all creation (2.9-11). For Balthasar, Christ’s kenosis has undoubted salvific consequences because it extends to enduring actively the descent into hell, pouring out, into the most alienated existential condition, his very self: he empties himself therefore that we might be full (Ephesians 3.19; Colossians 2.10; cf. John 1.16), becomes poor that we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8.9), becomes a curse for us so that we might be blessed (Galatians 3.13-14), becomes sin “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5.21).²² Perhaps these vivid and often startling images unpack what Paul intended when he endeavoured to encourage the Ephesians to imitate Christ’s self-giving, to give to the other in their place of need and weakness and by so pouring out oneself in costly, lifelong fidelity discover the essence of marriage. Yet this is only half the story as far as marriage is concerned. Past and present witness to countless marriages involving costly, sacrificial love – but on one side alone (normally, though not exclusively, the wife). Such relationships, often violent or abusive, yet retaining the loving devotion and endurance of one partner despite the horrendous callousness or brutality of the other, cannot represent the Christian ideal, for the self-giving of one must be matched by the other, not in mindlessly mirroring particular kindnesses and compassion, but in responding to the other in dynamic, creative, tender and surprising ways. The equality of the marriage covenant is seen in the identical wording of the marriage declarations of modern marriage liturgies as bride and bridegroom alike commit to “love ... comfort ... honour and care” in exclusive, life-long fidelity and in the vows “to love and to cherish according to the will and purpose of God.”²³ The self-giving love of marriage is to be mutual and reciprocal, an ecstasy in the root sense of *ekstasis* meaning to stand outside oneself through giving oneself and find through that costly act oneself mysteriously reconfigured and abundantly enriched.²⁴ That mutuality is not merely a

22 See especially Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume II: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, 1992, tr, Graham Harrison, San Francisco: Ignatius Press and *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, volume IV: *The Action*, 1994, tr, Graham Harrison, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, as well as *Mysterium Paschale*, 1990, tr. Aidan Nichols, OP Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; second edition, 1993, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. For a detailed exploration of Paul’s distinctive ‘interchange formulae’ see Morna D. Hooker, 1990, *From Adam to Christ: essays on Paul*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

23 *Gwasanaethau Priodas / Marriage Services* (Cardiff: Church in Wales Publications, 2011), pp. 11 and 12.

24 This ultimately rests upon a claim that a gift is no one-way transfer but profoundly reflexive. This assertion would be severely challenged by some philosophers, not least the late French writer Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) who insists that any donation inhabits a circle of debt and recompense which immediately negates its status as *gift*. For Derrida, the gift, therefore, is “*the*

sentimental ideal but needs to be embodied in the spectrum of life's activities, be that the equitable sharing of household chores, in career choices or the nurture of children, whilst being expressed with particular intensity in sexual intercourse, which "at its best... is the most complete and intimate reciprocal self-giving of which two persons are capable, making them, in the biblical phrase, 'one flesh' (Gen. 2.24)... profoundly and permanently [affecting] the partners in their inward being... [establishing] a mutual belonging, a new community."²⁵

Nevertheless, there is clearly a gulf between Christ's salvific self-giving and human marital mutuality, for whilst healthy relationships depend on profound life-giving reciprocity, the needy sinner has nothing to give God that could ever earn or repay the gift received in creation, preservation and salvation. It is while we are weak, ungodly sinners and enemies of God, entirely "[fallen] short of the glory of God" (Romans 3.23) that Christ dies for us and we receive "the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5.15) that frees us from being in Adam to being in him. The sovereign, free, unmerited, unrepayable nature of divine grace resounds throughout Romans and yet that does not mean that there is no tangible response, for, having outlined his theology of sin, redemption and glorification – as well as the complex interrelated salvation paths of both Jew and Gentile – Paul bids his readers to make an embodied response: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12.1). This costly living involves, among other things, a commitment to "let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour." (12.9-10). So just as the Johannine community come to know what love was through God's action in sending his Son to be the expiation for their sins – rather than any love that they themselves had shown (1 John 4.8) – the proof of their thankful, responsive love for God is manifested in love for one another (4.20).

But Balthasar would wish to go further than this. For whilst Christ embodies pure gift handed over so that the other might thrive and respond in thankful, sacrificial love, the dynamic is rooted in the divine life itself. Christ's self-emptying, extolled by Paul in Philippians 2, represents, for Balthasar, the space-time manifestation of the primal, supremely reciprocal, Trinitarian kenosis (which Balthasar terms *Urkenosis*) which constitutes Father and Son in the Holy Spirit. Balthasar expresses his notion of eternal Trinitarian gift-exchange beautifully in the following prayer:

You, Father, give your entire being as God to the Son; you are Father only inasmuch as you give yourself; you, Son, receive everything from the Father and before Him you want nothing other than one receiving and giving back, the one representing, glorifying the Spirit, are the unity of these two mutually meeting, self-givings, their We as a new I that royally, divinely rules them both.²⁶

Here Balthasar is essentially echoing the theology of Thomas Aquinas who taught that whilst creatures *have* relations God *is* relation: "in God relation and essence do not differ from each other, but are one and the same."²⁷ So God is eternally that act of self-giving love by which Father, Son and Spirit are constituted: "love knows divine life as bestowal and self-emptying: it knows a bestowal and self-emptying so complete, in the relation of Father and Son, that it knows there can be no 'terminus' to the act of self-giving. Its perfect reception in the Son is the ground

impossible". Whilst not denying the *ontology* of the gift, he maintains that it can never appear and never be recognised. See, e.g., his *Given time. 1. Counterfeit Money*, 1992 [Translation of: *Donner le temps. 1. La fausse monnaie*; trans. Peggy Kamuf], Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Christianity, on the other hand, rejoices that in Christ and the Spirit the gift *has* appeared, been received and caused salvific transformation.

²⁵ Macquarrie, p. 224.

²⁶ Quoted in M. Kehl and T. Norris (eds), *The Von Balthasar Reader*, 1992, New York, pp. 428-9.

²⁷ *Summa Theologiae* Ia q. 28 a. 2, *responsio*.

of its overflow and excess in the Spirit.”²⁸ Moreover, for Aquinas, the missions of both Christ and the Spirit depend upon and manifest their eternal procession in God; so Christ’s loving self-giving to the Church manifests in time and space his eternal loving gift to the Father in the Spirit. Based upon exegesis of the Philippian kenotic hymn, many contemporary New Testament scholars similarly regard Christ’s self-emptying not as some necessary act undertaken purely for redemptive purposes somehow yet ‘additional’ to God but profoundly revealing the nature of God as Trinity:

In worlds such as ours and Paul’s where power is manifested in self-assertion, acquisition, and domination, Christ reveals that God’s power, indeed the triune nature, is made known to the world in the act of self-emptying. Self-emptying is not so much a single act as the fundamental disposition of the eternal relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus becomes the decisive revelation to us of that “self-emptying” that eternally characterizes the triune life of God.²⁹

So if the ideal of Christian marriage entails mutual self-giving love that seeks to embody Christ’s perfect sacrificial love for the Church (Ephesians 5), it also participates in the eternal, mutual, kenotic love of Father and Son in the Holy Spirit. Marriage offers a lifelong opportunity to obey Christ’s gospel imperative to live sacrificially, in cross-bearing fidelity, “[living] ecstatically through exchange, losing our lives in order to gain them.”³⁰

The debate regarding the sacramentality of marriage may remain unresolved in an ‘official’ sense within Anglicanism, as indicated by the well-established Anglo-Catholic desire to affirm the full sevenfold sacramental array, alongside others who would either (like Luther) reject such aspirations entirely or (like the 1662 Book of Common Prayer marriage rite) avoid all explicitly sacramental language and tacitly support the non-sacramental line detailed elsewhere. Nevertheless, the understanding of marriage as mirroring Christ’s sacrificial self-giving would suggest marriage to be *supremely* sacramental, an icon of the life of God to which it aspires and in which the selfishness of human relationships will be overcome in superabundant divine love which in Christ reaches into the abyss to transform the void of giftless, loveless, sinful existence. Whilst marriage might remain ‘problematic’ as far as the strict axioms of the medieval Scholastics are concerned and whilst the 1662 BCP might regard it as primarily for procreation and the avoidance of sin, regarding it as (potentially) a glimpse into the life of God reveals an

28 Rowan Williams, ‘What does love know? St. Aquinas on the Trinity’ in *New Blackfriars* 82 (2001), pp. 260 – 272; here, p. 271.

29 Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians*, 2005, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 96-7; cf. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God crucified and other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity*, 2008, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 45; N.T Wright *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, 1991, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p.84; Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*, 2009, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 21.

30 John Milbank, *Being reconciled: ontology and pardon*, 2003, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 103.

expansive vision that accords with Revelation's heavenly vision of the Lamb who gives himself unto death for love of the bride, thereby inviting the blessed to the marriage banquet. Eternally generative, unswervingly faithful, blissfully *ek-static*, this Trinitarian icon sets marriage in a truly *theological* frame.

This also supports an understanding of the sacraments in general not merely according to the seemingly austere logic of much medieval sacramental theology but more richly as above all acts of pure *joy* as God's eternal blissfulness, manifested in Jesus, is communicated to a sometimes joyless world: "it is about being woven into Jesus so that his life – that pure rhapsody of joy – plays through ours, through our unique lives and circumstances and freedom, making a joy which is always different and yet always the same. Being woven into his joy is why we have sacraments."³¹ Sacraments are fundamentally transformative, rooted in the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection which contain, embrace, transcend and heal human sinfulness and death-bound limitation within a sinless, heaven-bound, resurrective vision:

The event of Christ's Pasch, which is the event of God's gift of Word and Spirit, events again in the event of Church becoming through sacrament, and in virtue of this the sacrament brings the Church into a communion with the eternal mystery of the Triune God.... The sacramental Church constantly looks to the future for the gift of divine love and self-emptying which may come into human lives in ways not planned or foreseen, finding a place in the flux of human existence in virtue of this memory and this hope.³²

That sacraments refer the church *back* to the memory of Jesus – who incarnates the Trinitarian exchange unto death "in the eternal Spirit" (Hebrews 9.14) – and *onward* to the heavenly *telos* where sacraments shall cease where we attain to the *res tantum*, that pure, all-pervading reality that no longer requires mediation through sacraments. Here sin shall be defeated definitively and creation shall participate perfectly (*qua* creation) in the divine life of endless, blissful communion. Marriage may – in the loving, self-giving union of man and woman – offer some tantalising glimpse of the fullness to come, unimaginably expanded beyond the confine of a single, exclusive relationship to become unfathomably fruitful.

Mutual self-giving as a basis for gay marriage?

All that has been written and envisaged hitherto has referred implicitly to the union of man and woman. But might these insights be extended in order to provide theological legitimation for the

31 Waddell, p. 18.

32 David N. Power, *Sacrament: the Language of God's Giving*, 1999, New York: Crossroad, p. 95.

marriage union of two men or two women? Archbishop Justin Welby has commended gay couples in loving, stable and monogamous relationships that are “just stunning in [their] quality”, presumably demonstrating the mutual, ecstatic, other-regarding gift-of-self that I have proposed as a mark of true marriage. Participating by grace in the love that Christ has shown for his church, which is itself the incarnate manifestation unto-and-beyond-death of the timeless person-constituting relations of the Trinity, would indeed appear to be an ideal as valid for homosexual couples as heterosexual couples. Then the goal of sacraments – including marriage, if we allow it that descriptor – is about the sanctification of the human person in preparation for participation in the utterly joyful heavenly vision of the perfect, unrestricted, reciprocal love of God. The marriage relationship may afford the space to reveal something of that eternal self-giving in the mundane reality of everyday life: “it is impossible to separate the divine kenosis from the one that must be carried out in ourselves: our corporality is charged with becoming the place for this kenosis. In our corporality, the most distant is also the closest, the most divine is also the most human.”³³

The words of introduction to the 2011 Church in Wales marriage service could apply, in large measure, to the union of two women or two men in regarding their relationship as “a gift of God” through which they “grow together in the knowledge, love and service of God” and “united with one another in heart, in mind and in body... increase in love and trust”, a genuine “life-long union”³⁴ that reveals something of the eternal union with God and one another for which are destined by God. With gay couples now eligible to become adoptive parents and some lesbians choosing to become mothers through artificial insemination, a gay marriage may be fruitful in childbearing and child-rearing, augmenting what Church and society might deem to be “the foundation of family life... in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love”, thus “[enriching] society and [strengthening] community.”³⁵ One might envisage that a bold widening of the ‘target audience’ of the 1662 BCP’s description of marriage, together with an inversion of the order of priority of three main tenets (a task already undertaken in most modern Anglican marriage liturgies), would provide a solid basis.

Yet more work needs to be done. Simply to say that ecstatic self-giving love is necessary and *sufficient* for a relationship to be eligible to be called ‘marriage’ is clearly inadequate as there

33 Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: a sacramental reinterpretation of Christian existence*. Translated by Patrick Madigan, S.J. and Madeleine Beaumont. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 509.

34 *Gwasanaethau Priodas / Marriage Services*, p. 5.

35 *Ibid.*

might be supremely loving incestuous or polygamous relationships, yet unworthy of blessing. Whilst the ‘deep structure’ and final end of marriage (as of the entire creation) is the eternal communion of the divine Persons, we cannot circumvent the actual ‘texture’ of particular relationships. Profound theological investigation needs to be undertaken in relating the sacramental vision of marriage presented here with inherent questions surrounding gender and personhood not least in dialogue with the enshrined – and somewhat immovable – conservatism of other churches. For whilst the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* portrays marriage in the context of responsive self-giving love, it does so specifically for “man and woman [whose] mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man [sic]. It is good, very good, in the Creator’s eyes.”³⁶ Despite some recent unexpected conciliatory words from Pope Francis, the Roman Catholic Church seems far from reversing or softening its stance that homosexual acts are “intrinsically disordered” and thereby presumably falling far short of what the Church would require as basis for blessing a sacramental union. The Church regards children as “the supreme gift of marriage” strengthening “true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it disposing the spouses to co-operate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Saviour.”³⁷ Given its aversion to all manner of artificial reproductive techniques, regarding openness to childbearing as paramount keeps gay relationships somewhat beyond the pale as far as marriage is concerned.

Nevertheless, countless gay couples demonstrate faithful, stable, loving, self-giving that is fruitful – possibly involving children but equally, for example, in the pursuit of justice and the common good. Moreover, such relationships can and do manifest some hints of the mutuality inherent in God’s intentions when creating humankind, releasing ecstatic joy that overflows creatively into society. Encounter with the other – whose relationships differ from the norm and often suffer exclusion – may confront the church with an unexpected vision of revelatory kenotic love. That being so, there remains within all churches a need for a compassionate, informed and bold response.

A recent series of scholarly papers from North American Anglican theologians illustrates this on-going debate, casting the discussion surrounding the appropriateness or otherwise of allowing homosexuals to marry in church within an implicitly sacramental frame. The eight scholars,

³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1603. Balthasar takes sexual difference as essential to the divinely-intended unity of creation. For an introduction to, and critique of, his thought in this area, see, e.g., Corinne Crammer, ‘One sex or two? Balthasar’s theology the sexes’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 2004, edited by Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 93-112.

³⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* 48, quoted in *Catechism*, para. 1652.

tasked collectively in 2008 by the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church to reflect on these critical issues, naturally gravitated towards two broadly separate groups – self-styled ‘traditionalist’ and ‘liberal’ gatherings, each acting as theological advocates for quite different attitudes within the church and beyond.³⁸

The sacramental view of marriage emerges strongly (but sometimes obliquely) among the ‘liberals’ who, nevertheless, espouse a high Christology and set their support for same-sex marriage within language of mission and evangelism, this task of witness broadly regarded as the faithful corollary to the Trinitarian processions ‘unfolded’ in the economic missions of the Son and Spirit.³⁹ The authors insist that, far from undermining the church’s core proclamation as some traditionalists fear, expanding the definition of marriage to include same-sex union actually strengthens marriage’s power to “[bear] witness to the reality of Jesus Christ for the world.”⁴⁰ Contending that as the early church, intent on the proclamation of the gospel, deliberated on the terms of the inclusion of Gentiles within the company of the saved and so chose to relax the pre-conditions for membership (Acts 15), so too the church today witnesses the generous self-donation of homosexuals in loving and committed relationships and discerns a movement of the Holy Spirit today for the cause of the wider *Missio Dei*.⁴¹ The liberals thereby regard marriage as a sacrament through which the church “bears witness to the love that Christ shows for the world and the community that the Spirit makes” and the couple “give their bodies over to one another and to the church to become a sign of God’s reconciliation” thereby “[patterning] desire ‘in the image of God’s constancy’.”⁴² The church is thereby strengthened in its missional activity of witness and reconciliation, bearing blessings to all people in the name of Christ who “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.”⁴³ The paper does not question the fundamental

38 For the sake of clarity and relative brevity, in the body of this paper I will discuss only the two parties’ respective reports and subsequent responses, placing occasional comments from the Anglican and ecumenical commentators, also included in the same issue of the *Anglican Theological Review*, in the footnotes alone.

39 Deirdre J. Good, Willis J. Jenkins, Cynthia B. Kittredge, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., ‘A theology of marriage including same-sex couples: a view from the liberals’ in *Anglican Theological Review* (hereafter *ATR*), 93:1, pp. 51-87.

40 *Ibid.* p. 53.

41 *Ibid.* p. 54. The liberals place their exegetical arguments beneath an overriding concern for the church’s mission. In the opinion of Joseph Galagola, such an approach renders the biblical witness wrongly subservient to mission and the supposed, but not scripturally established, guidance of the Spirit. See Joseph D. Galagola, ‘A response from Joseph D. Galagola’, *ATR* 93:1, pp. 115-117. Galgalo also questions whether the liberals’ emphasis on marriage – whether heterosexual or homosexual – as intrinsically linked to sanctification can be justified.

42 Good et al., ‘A theology of marriage’, pp. 54-5.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

legitimacy of homosexual relationships but contends, rather, that the church should marry same-sex couples in order to overcome the unchastity of unblessed union.⁴⁴

In grappling with the problematic biblical texts that would apparently stifle ‘expansionist’ arguments, the liberals hold that, in alluding to the marriage paradigms of Genesis 1-2, neither Jesus nor Paul make mention of procreation (Genesis 1:28) and thus provide no support for those who argue that capacity for biological fertility is essential for marriage.⁴⁵ In insisting that “there is no longer male and female” for all are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), Paul places the gender differentiation of Genesis 1:27 “under a Christological judgment”, regarding Christ as the Bridegroom of men and women equally and steering the true essence of marriage away from gendered difference.⁴⁶ Moreover, Genesis 2:24 receives a “Christological expansion” in Ephesians 5:31-33 for the departure of a man from his parents in order to become one flesh with his wife is deliberately taken as an allegory for the true reality signified, namely the union of Christ with his church.⁴⁷ The goal of the author of Ephesians is thus to support “neither procreationism nor complementarianism” but to stress how marriage may “witness to the love of God for God’s people.”⁴⁸ The ‘liberals’ teach therefore that marriage is an ascetic ‘school for virtue’, turning the *eros* of the ‘one flesh’ generated by marriage into *caritas*, namely the love of God and neighbour signalled by Jesus as the two great commandments.⁴⁹

Regarding sexual orientation as an indicator of personal desire whose true end is not one’s marriage partner but Christ who satisfies “the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16), the authors propose that this crucial path towards sanctification happens through marriage to a partner “of the *apposite* sex, typically but not necessarily the *opposite* sex”⁵⁰, one whose life-giving difference may or may not involve physical gendered distinction. Marriage acts as medicine to heal and transform personal woundedness and reaches well beyond the mere union of two human beings to help enact the union of Christ and his church which is the true *mystērion*

44 The extent of the liberals’ sacramental emphasis – placing same-sex marriage seemingly within a necessary and inherent Christological, eschatological context – is questioned by Kevin Ward, who, in responding to the divergent positions represented, wonders whether this overtly theological approach serves to undermine any sense that a same-sex (or, for that matter, heterosexual) relationship has value and legitimacy *prior to*, or *outside of*, the church’s explicit blessing. See Kevin Ward, ‘A response from Kevin Ward’, *ATR* 93:1, pp. 135-139.

45 Good et al., ‘A theology of marriage’, p. 67.

46 *Ibid*, p. 70.

47 *Ibid*, p. 70.

48 *Ibid*, p. 70. These scholars argue that Paul does this not through innovation but merely developing existing Jewish exegesis of the love paradigms of the Song of Songs.

49 *Ibid*, p. 71.

50 *Ibid*, p. 72.

which Christian marriage signifies.⁵¹ The sacrament therefore has a strongly missional focus in witnessing to and (literally) embodying a theological vision which is rooted in a profound desire for the unity and reconciliation of all things in Christ whose own passionate desire led him to the cross, handing over his body to be given (historically and eucharistically) for all manner of people that they might be sanctified. Hence, “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.”⁵² Marriage thus witnesses to Christ’s victory fulfilled in resurrection and overflows with inexpressible joy, a delight which desires the good of the other and is truly a foretaste of the marriage feast of the Lamb.⁵³

These liberal scholars claim that their ‘expansionist’ proposals do not represent a fundamental departure from the tone and spirit of the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church, citing numerous examples of how this well-established rite emphasises Christ’s self-giving, transformative love as the basis for married persons’ own faithful self-donation, for example in the eucharistic preface for marriage:

Because in the love of wife and husband,
you have given us an image of the heavenly Jerusalem,
adorned as a bride for her bridegroom,
your Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
who loves her and gave himself for her
that he might make the whole creation new.⁵⁴

Good, Jenkins, Kittredge and Rogers present a beautiful theology of marriage that could serve to justify the church’s wholehearted blessing of the love of two people of the same sex. It depends upon a certain ‘abstraction’ from the patterns of heterosexual union described in Scripture, celebrated in liturgy and embodied in lifelong commitment, regarding the distilled essence of marriage to transcend sexual orientation. Nevertheless, can this essence be so readily extracted from the male-female procreative ‘structure’ that some would regard as essential?

51 *Ibid*, pp. 74-76.

52 *Ibid*, p. 85.

53 *Ibid*, pp. 86-7.

54 *Ibid*, pp. 64-5

The four ‘traditionalists’⁵⁵ who contributed to the theological colloquy on same-sex unions would dissent, considering, for example, Jesus’ allusions to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in Mark 10:2-9 to reaffirm the principles of marriage without implying adaptation or expansion. They argue that Jesus thereby strengthens the understanding of marriage as between two people of the opposite sex, related to fertility and procreation and involving passion, commitment and permanence. Whilst conceding that the final cluster of characteristics may be demonstrated in same-sex unions, they regard the absence of the first two to be a serious obstacle.⁵⁶ Moreover, consideration of the few biblical texts dealing explicitly with homosexual acts leads these scholars to affirm Richard Hays’ judgement that they are “are unambiguously and unremittingly negative in their judgment.”⁵⁷ For example, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are not easily dismissed as (now superseded) purity laws for their underlying principles cohere with Jesus’ Genesis allusions in Mark 10.⁵⁸ Paul’s reflections on creation’s purpose and idolatry’s insidious snares in Romans 1:18–32 highlight homosexuality as one sign of humanity’s universal alliance with sin, representing an “inversion of the created order ... a sign of this larger condition of fallen humanity.”⁵⁹

So unlike the liberals who entertain the prospect that Pauline and deuterio-Pauline texts might support the ‘liberation’ of marriage from its solely heterosexual context, raising it towards its *ascended* purpose in the new creation, the traditionalists would regard the plainer meaning of Romans to denounce homosexual practice as a *descent* towards shame and degradation. Whilst acknowledging that certain Christians’ acceptance and promotion of gay marriage might conceivably be read as part of the progressive revelation to the church – an ‘Acts 15 moment’ or a fuller unfolding of the implications of Galatians 3.28⁶⁰ – these traditionalists nevertheless reject arguments that regard the new, resurrection life as discontinuous with the old, sinful aeon. The resurrection represents “the renewal of the created *order*, but this created order retains its meaning and form”, including “human nature as created by God, and so the divine intention of the union of male and female in one flesh... living in the hope of the resurrection of the body

55 Mark D. Jordan finds the polarised nature of the papers to be deeply problematic as they nurture unhelpful dichotomy rather than beneficial dialogue. See Mark D. Jordan, ‘A response from Mark D. Jordan’, *ATR* 93:1, pp. 123-125.

56 John E. Goldingay, Grant R. LeMarquand, George R. Sumner and Daniel A. Westberg, ‘Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: A View from the Traditionalists’, *ATR* 93:1, pp. 1-50; here, p. 25.

57 *Ibid*, pp. 25-26.

58 *Ibid*, p. 26.

59 *Ibid*, p. 27.

60 Yet the traditionalists’ later response to the liberals undermines such usage of these texts; see below.

reminds us that God is restoring creation, not abolishing the old and replacing it with something very different.”⁶¹ Hence, the undoubted spiritual meaning that Ephesians 5.31-32 overlays upon marriage does not undo or circumvent the inherently heterosexual context.⁶² Furthermore, questioning the widespread assumption that homosexuality represents an innate, unchangeable (and hence God-given) orientation, the traditionalists maintain that natural law affirms the purpose of marriage – and, in particular, sex – to be for procreation, alongside the ‘unitive’ good of providing companionship, pleasure and fulfilment.⁶³ Supporting a conservative position on homosexuality is, for these scholars, vital so as to avoid being “conformed to this world” (Romans 12.2) and regarding the witness of scripture to be somehow read according to the ‘hermeneutical key’ of prevailing secular priorities.

In a formal response (also included, alongside responses from several other theologians, in the same edition of the *Anglican Theological Review*), Goldingay, LeMarquand, Sumner and Westberg accuse the liberals of too easily equating current pro-homosexual changes to marriage legislation with the *Missio Dei*, thereby attributing culturally acquiescent theological modifications quite wrongly to the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴ Moreover, they detect faulty exegesis in several places, including the interpretation of Acts 15. The inclusion of Gentiles within God’s people (demonstrated in that particular case through the relinquishing of circumcision as a defining mark) was, unlike the expansionist redefinition of marriage, explicitly foretold by the prophets (e.g. Isaiah 2.2-4). Furthermore, this pastoral measure also stipulated refraining from sexual immorality, *porneia*.⁶⁵ Other examples of divergent hermeneutical methods abound. Whereas the liberals understood Paul’s denouncement of inappropriate sexual licence to mean being oversexed, acting as *para phusin* (Rom. 1.26) – “beyond nature” – the traditionalists point out that the specific context of condemning *same-sex* relations is conveniently overlooked.⁶⁶ Equally, the liberals’ use of Ephesians 5 to propose that the union of Christ and his church is the

61 *Ibid*, pp. 28-29; italics original.

62 *Ibid*, p. 29.

63 *Ibid*, pp. 29-42.

64 John E. Goldingay, Grant R. LeMarquand, George R. Sumner and Daniel A. Westberg, ‘The Traditionalist Response’, *ATR*, 93:1, pp. 89-100; here, p. 91. In response, however, Sarah Coakley questions whether the traditionalists, in turn, are too ready to read the liberals’ apparent compliance with wider socio-cultural shifts as being an easy or convenient ploy. She stresses the liberals’ understanding of marriage as “an *ascetical* and lifelong undertaking, not only for the good of the couple concerned but for the life of the church and of the world. Marriage is in this sense a “martyrdom”— a witness, both suffering and joyful, to the life of Christ, and to Christ’s love of the body, his church.” See Sarah Coakley, ‘A response from Sarah Coakley’, *ATR* 93:1, pp. 111-113; quotation, p. 112.

65 Goldingay *et al*, ‘The Traditionalist Response’, p. 94.

66 *Ibid*, p. 95.

overwhelmingly significant aspect of marriage ignores the clearly *heterosexual* context which the biblical author imports (unquestioningly) from Genesis, whilst suggesting, in the language of typological hermeneutics, that the type (marriage) can *only* be understood from the antitype (final ecclesial union with the Lord).⁶⁷ Whilst the liberals' exegesis provides an energetic case for same-sex marriage through finding the quintessence of the sacrament somehow beyond the outward and visible, the traditionalists argue that the outward and visible really does matter, so that the actual form and structure of marriage (and hence creation itself) are not alterable.

So can the liberals' sacramental approach finally be defended to provide a basis for same-sex marriage? In their formal response, the liberals accept that the scriptural texts which they reinterpret, somewhat contentiously, do not envisage anything approaching homosexual marriage and so concede that, on face value, traditionalist exegesis remains valid.⁶⁸ Arguing less from literal exegesis as from "the moral patterns of Scripture", they are concerned as to "how God uses marital faithfulness to heal and perfect sinners."⁶⁹ Observing how oppressive patterns of authority once believed to set husband over wife, master over slave and parent over child have "been substantially revised in the direction of egalitarianism, mutuality, and democracy" they believe that similar revision is due with respect to marriage.⁷⁰ Whereas the traditionalists' response to the pastoral question of homosexuality proposed either abstinence, sublimation or therapeutic change, the liberals suggest that such approaches may mask fundamental self-deception and where an individual marries of the opposite, but not apposite, sex "it leads to lying of the body, adultery, and divorce, instead of the truthfulness of the body, faithfulness, and constancy."⁷¹ Instead, same-sex marriage mirrors more authentically Christ's self-offering for the world for "salvation in Christ arose not from a great self-refusal, but from a great self-gift. 'For God so loved the world.' 'This is my body, given for you.' To live out that pattern, marriage must not bypass but, like the incarnation, take up the body in its movement of love."⁷² The other options to

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Deirdre J. Good, Willis J. Jenkins, Cynthia B. Kittredge, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., 'The Liberal Response', *ATR* 93:1, pp. 101-110.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁷² *Ibid.* Margaret Kim Peterson sees a similar, yet atheological, shift in the wider perception of marriage as an institution based not on procreation but a contract rooted in love – "a freely chosen affective and erotic bond." She therefore raises the possibility that the overwhelming priority of love, regardless of underlying religious belief, means that gay marriage is as legitimate as heterosexual marriage. See Margaret Kim Peterson, 'A response from Margaret Kim Peterson' *ATR* 93:1, 127-129, quotation, p. 128.

pursuing one's undeniable homosexual inclinations towards a committed married relationship "do not take the body seriously enough for the incarnation"⁷³ for

only in self-donation can God expand the body toward the Trinitarian exchange of gift, gratitude, and mutual joy. In self-donation, God became human. In self-donation, humans become open to God, but hardly in self-sufficiency. That resembles the pride that does not befriend but seeks to bypass and abandon the body.⁷⁴

Acknowledging that the science of sexual orientation remains inconclusive, the liberal scholars nevertheless assert that human sexuality is mysteriously formed from the womb and is a 'christological condition ... [shaping] ways of participating in the body of Christ' as "God in Christ orients desire godward through various capacities to desire others" and the Holy Spirit "hovers over the waters of the womb to prepare all persons for inclusion in the body of Christ."⁷⁵ Arguing, with Paul Evdokimov, that Catholicism bases its theology of marriage on procreation, whilst Protestantism emphasises the control of lustfulness, the authors believe the Orthodox vision of marriage as training in virtue, or sanctification, both places the other two perspectives in a more expansive sacramental context focused on a higher end, namely "growth into God" and regards marriage as "a means by which God may bring a couple to himself, by exposing them to each other."⁷⁶

Conclusion

The sacramental liberals end their paper by stressing how our common baptism unites to others of differing opinion, recognising that there is no salvation outside the bonds of relationship. Embracing the common task of listening but not uniformity, the Holy Spirit enlarges the church through diverse witness in many languages, embodying unity without stifling diversity.⁷⁷ Yet the central matter remains in all its divisive, Communion-splitting potential, the issue perceptively reduced by the traditionalists to the fundamental question, "are same-sex relations an effect of the fall or a blessing of creation?"⁷⁸ Whilst conservatives locate their response unequivocally on one side, the liberals occupy a quite different, largely irreconcilable, position, content not simply to offer some of kind of blessing for same-sex unions but to regard them as being as candidates for valid, complete marriages, wholly equal to heterosexual marriages. Despite the differing appeals

73 Good et al, 'The liberal response', p. 105.

74 *Ibid*, p. 106.

75 *Ibid*, p. 107.

76 *Ibid*, p. 108.

77 *Ibid*, pp. 109-110.

78 Goldingay et al, 'The Traditionalist Response', p. 99.

to orthodoxy, in the end orthopraxis must prevail and it will be the task of the Church in Wales, as much as any other constituent province of the Anglican Communion, to decide on its action, reflecting prayerfully on the two positions represented here whilst yearning intensely for the guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads the Church into all truth (John 16:13).

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