



# THE NEED FOR A THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST SAME-SEX BLESSINGS

in The Anglican Church of Canada today

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## Introduction

This paper is part of a series of fifteen papers published by the Primate's Theological Commission (PTC) of The Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) in June 2009 to explore the theological dimensions of the question whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine. Paul Jennings' contribution to this series is a clear and persuasive argument in support of same-sex blessings (SSB). This paper is something different. It is not simply the other side of the argument — I am incapable of such a task. Rather, I will attempt to point to the need for a similar credible theological argument against Same Sex Blessings (SSB) in the ACC, and I will suggest what such an argument might look like. The role of the PTC and its members is not to enter into the debate in order to convince the ACC of one position or other, but solely to make the Church aware of the theological questions that relate to the debate. This is my intent.

The context of my remarks is the theological thinking of this matter in the ACC in recent years. Of course this thinking has been informed by the wider debate about gay marriage in Canadian society. As well, Canadian Anglican theologians have engaged with the various forms of emerging theological discourse around this question throughout the Christian world generally, and within worldwide Anglicanism in particular. The literature that seeks to describe the historical and cultural development of marriage generally in western civilization is enormous, and there are plenty of accounts of the more limited focus on the "Christianization of Marriage."<sup>1</sup> The many published bibliographies of literature relating to the debate within the Christian and Anglican Church shows an impressive, if daunting, amount of material available for the Canadian Anglican who wishes to become theologically literate on the question. A review of the sustained Biblical and theological arguments against SSB will not be found in this paper.

Instead, this paper is very limited in scope and is a very personal reflection on the current status of the debate in Canadian Anglicanism. I will attempt to engage the actual conversation that is continuing to shape our common life together in the ACC in 2009 to ask if a substantial theological argument against SSB is possible within the ACC today.

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1. See Reynolds, P.L. *Marriage in the Western Church: the Christianization of marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods*, Leiden, 2001, who coins this phrase and offers a select bibliography of material to the ninth century where his study concludes.

## What we mean by Same-Sex Blessings — not Same-Sex Marriages

If the ACC decides to begin the practice of SSB I understand that the Church through its ordered clergy will give public blessings to gay couples who have been married civilly. Further, I think that the following are reasonable expectations that follow from a SSB: acknowledgement that such a couple might wish a SSB in the context of a Eucharistic celebration to be a visible sign of their desire to be spiritually nourished in their relationship through the Sacraments, encouragement of the gay couple to invite others (both in the local congregation and beyond) to join with them in the celebration of the blessing of their union, expectation of ongoing pastoral counselling from the Church with a view to strengthening the life together of the gay couple, and an encouragement of the couple, as individuals and together, to participate fully in the life of the Church without hindrance or exclusion.

This paper does not address directly the question of Same-Sex Marriage (SSM). For some, the question of SSM raises additional issues that go beyond that of SSBs, evidenced by the fact that within the conversation in ACC some strong supporters of SSBs have been non-supporters of SSM. Whether such a distinction is ultimately legitimate, or will continue to be made in the future, is uncertain, but at this stage of the conversation in Canada many people do understand the nature of SSB to be different from that of SSM.<sup>2</sup> The series of papers published by the PTC to which this paper contributes all address the question of SSB as well.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, I judge that there is increasing consensus with the suggestion of the Saint Michael Report (SMR) that SSBs are at least analogous to the Christian understanding of marriage and must be considered in the light of that understanding. Para 39 of SMR says this:

It is the view of the Commission that any proposed blessing of a same-sex relationship would be analogous to a marriage to such a degree as to require the church to understand it coherently in relation to the doctrine of marriage.

### Why this question now?

Today in Canada, for reasons both scientific and cultural, persons who discover themselves romantically and sexually attracted to persons of the same-sex, and who are inclined emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and physically to enter into intimate loving relationships with persons of the same-sex, identify themselves as lesbian or gay.<sup>4</sup> This self-designation carries with it the notion that the disposition to same-sex intimacy is part of the character of a gay person, usually with the inference that the same-sex attraction is a disposition with which they are born, or at least

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2. It is interesting to reflect upon this attempted distinction in light of the generally acknowledged fact that marriages were not performed at all by the Church in the early centuries. Rather those married by civil authorities would be fully recognized as married by the Church, and as baptized Christians they would accept the specific Christian teachings of Scripture. The unraveling of the precise history of when and how the Western Church (the history of marriage in the Eastern Church is different) instituted a nuptial liturgy is complicated and controversial.

3. The tasks given to the PTC by the Primate, upon request of the General Synods of 2004 and 2007, have been to consider the doctrinal status of SSBs and not SSMs.

4. Of course this is a simplification. The movement in Canadian culture that has been successful in expanding the provision of marriage to include same-sex couples is supported as a human-rights issue for all persons who do not self-identify as exclusively heterosexual. This includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersexual persons. I shall use “gay” as a shorthand to include all those persons who romantically are attracted to persons of the same sex and who form intimate emotional, psychological, and spiritual relationships with persons of the same-sex, whilst having the desire to share physical intimacy as well.

has developed at such an early age that their character is unalterably shaped by same-sex attraction by the time that typical sexual exploration occurs during adolescence. Since the late 1960's in Canada, through long and difficult advocacy that has met with and overcome terrible bigotry, persecution, and violence,<sup>5</sup> the self-designation of gays has won overwhelming social acceptability. A significant element in the case for the recognition of gay lifestyle as an issue of basic justice and human rights for gay persons has been the supposed consensus of the scientific community that same-sex attraction in many instances is a biological disposition that is present from birth. As I write this in 2009, Canadian federal legislation protects gays from discrimination in any form. In 2004 the Supreme Court interpreted the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as not only allowing but actually leaning toward or pointing to same-sex marriage. The civil marriage of same-sex couples is practiced in most provinces.

In The Anglican Church of Canada this relatively recent and rapid societal interpretation that there is a significant population that is not heterosexual and thus by nature (or irreversible early nurture) is capable only of significant intimate bonding with persons of the same sex has issued an urgent challenge. More to the point, many Anglicans, both clergy and lay, have been emboldened by the general societal acceptance of gay lifestyle to disclose their own gay orientation and character, and some Anglican gay couples revealed their long-term faithful, loving, and monogamous relationships about which previously they had remained silent for fear of censure by the Church. Thus gay couples shared with their Church that they were living in such relationships without the benefit of the Church's blessing or the opportunity to exchange vows in the Church. Nevertheless they described to the rest of the Anglican Church a relationship that they were convinced was blessed by God (though not formally by the Church), and that this relationship included the forms of mutuality of love, intimacy, and monogamous commitment that seemed equal to the experience of heterosexual Christian marriage. Many of these gay couples now ask for the same opportunity as their heterosexual colleagues to receive the Blessing of the Church in recognition of the sanctity of their relationship. Such a blessing would be a public witness to the legitimacy of their vows as a witness to their life-long commitment of faithful love in which they seek the active presence of God and support of the Christian community.

## The place of theological reasoning in the debate

Theology is a reflection upon the world through the lens of revealed Scripture as guided by the Holy Spirit in the ongoing and continuous tradition of the Church, in an attempt to understand God's created order with "the mind of Christ." Thus the present theological challenge is to determine whether a SSB is coherent with revealed Scripture as it has been received and interpreted within the tradition of the Church.

## The theology of Christian Marriage before the final quarter of the 20th century

For almost 2000 years the Christian church did not seriously entertain the notion that marriage could be other than the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all other, and that one of the purposes of marriage was procreation.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Cf. Larocque, Sylvain, *The Story of a Canadian Social Revolution: Gay Marriage*, Toronto, 2006.

6. That elderly people could marry was seen to be consistent with the intent of marriage, for the couple would at least have to be open to the possible of childrearing, if the "very unlikely" happened! Since the 1930's artificial contraception has been permitted by the Anglican Church for its members, but for purposes of family planning and responsible stewardship of resources — not to dismiss the possibility of procreation altogether.

Thus the theological reflection on marriage in the history of the Church assumes heterosexual marriage. It addressed such questions as the “mystery” of marriage as illustrative of the relation of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5), marriage as a sacrament, the necessary role of procreation in marriage, the indissolubility of marriage and Jesus’ teaching on divorce, the relative merits of the married and single life, the various duties of husband and wife to one another, hierarchy within marriage, whether the Bible teaches that marriage was an original purpose of God or the consequence of the fall, marriage as a remedy for sin and the God-given institution for the safe expression of our natural concupiscence, etc.

Suddenly, with the general cultural acceptance that gay persons had the right and expectation to enter into same-sex relationships, and as same-sex couples in the Church began to ask for the privilege to exchange vows in a public ceremony in the Church at which they would receive a nuptial blessing akin to that of heterosexual couples, the Church was required to consider the application of the traditional theology of Christian marriage to same-sex couples.

## **The need for a renewed theological reflection**

In the past three decades The Anglican Church of Canada with increasing urgency has attempted to think theologically about this new phenomenon in the history of the Church: same-sex monogamous relationships that claim to be at least analogous to marriage, if not an instance of marriage itself. The question itself is clear: are such same-sex unions consistent with the revelation of Scripture and doctrinally coherent with the teaching of the Christian tradition over the centuries such that they are understood to be a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine?

## **The strong theological argument against homosexual behaviour**

For almost 2000 years it would have been exceedingly difficult for any theologian to introduce the notion of SSB, and impossible for such a theologian to argue persuasively in favour of SSB. Homosexual sexual behaviour was thought to be contrary to natural law and promiscuous in nature. It was clearly condemned in both the Old Testament and New Testament as sinful in passages such as Leviticus 18.22 “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” and Romans 1:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.

## **The introduction of the gay person into the conversation**

As late as the 1960s in Canada homosexuality generally was seen to be an expression of unnatural sexual behaviour, morally reprehensible and punishable by law. More “compassionate” persons, both within and outside the Church,

advocated that those who practiced homosexual behaviour should not be sent to jail but rather receive psychiatric treatment to heal them of the disorder.<sup>7</sup>

Today, less than fifty years later, it would be reprehensible to suggest psychiatric treatment or prison for gays. This remarkable shift in societal attitude can be attributed almost entirely to a vigorous advocacy on behalf of those who insist that same-sex desire is not a choice, but an unalterable part of the character of about ten percent of the population. The current conversation in the ACC thus is placed within a cultural understanding that claims a scientific basis to remove any responsibility of the individual for his or her same-sex desire, or sexual “orientation.” “Homosexual acts” that were until recently understood to be “unnatural” are now considered by many to be only unnatural from the heterosexual point of view, and the only type of physical intimacy possible for that ten percent of the population. Thus, the theological challenge of the ACC today is not to consider the nature of “homosexual acts” in isolation, wickedly committed by heterosexual persons outside committed relationships for reasons of selfish pleasure and unnatural lust. Rather, the ACC is challenged to consider the nature and appropriateness of such acts within a same-sex monogamous relationship of loving commitment between two persons whose character is unalterably “gay”: i.e. those who are able to know the intimacy of love only within a same-sex relationship.

## The strong case for SSB

The theological argument in favour of SSBs has been repeated many times throughout the ACC. It is so clear and strong that I need not spend much time in describing it. The argument begins with the Biblical revelation of God as a Trinity of Love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Humankind has been created in that divine image<sup>8</sup> and thus by our very nature we are created to be in relationships of love with God and one another. These creative and divinely sanctioned relationships with others take many forms, and one of those forms is marriage: “instituted by God in the time of man’s innocency,” as the BCP puts it. The Christian understanding of marriage is that it represents “the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church”<sup>9</sup> and in the developed tradition three purposes of marriage were articulated: procreation, mutuality of a supportive relationship in which the couple grows in Christ, and the context in which sexual acts have their proper and only place.

Within this understanding of God and Christian marriage, theologians in the ACC have argued that the monogamous intended life-long gay relationship between two baptized Christians fulfills the requirements, intention and purposes of marriage “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part...” The testimony and witness of gay couples in

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7. The American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association pride themselves on having removed homosexuality from their list of “mental disorders” in 1973 and 1975 respectively. But it was they (in their “scientific” wisdom) who added homosexuality to such a list in the first place. The Church throughout its history generally has not suggested that those with same-sex desires were mentally ill, but that the same-sex erotic act is sinful, regardless of the “orientation” of the persons involved.

8. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” Genesis 1:26, 27.

9. Prayer from the “Solemnization of Matrimony,” in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Canada, 1962 p. 564, echoing Ephesians 5:20-32.

the ACC, including those whose unions or civil marriages have been blessed within the ACC,<sup>10</sup> speak undeniably of the love, self-sacrifice, fidelity, mutual support, compassion, faithfulness to the exclusion of all other, the positive role of consensual sexual acts of tenderness and intimacy in the expression of mutual love and the building up of the other and of the relationship, stability of home life, and a witness to the broader community of the sustaining love of God. If marriage is for “sanctification,”<sup>11</sup> or growing in Holiness through openness to the life-giving Holy Spirit, then same sex couples testify to this experience of this sanctification, and many in the church witness to the spiritual fruit and benefit to the whole community that results from the apparent sanctity of same-sex couples. Theologians point out that although same-sex couples cannot naturally conceive and bear children, neither can many heterosexual couples bear children because of impotency, disability, or being married at an elderly age. Heterosexual couples that have medical procedures to make it impossible for them either to impregnate or to bear children are married in the ACC without hesitation. Finally, it is argued reasonably and convincingly for most that same-sex couples are just as likely as other-sex couples to provide safe and loving homes for the raising of children.

The case for SSB is strong and compelling.

## **The challenge to present a theological case against SSB**

The challenge is twofold. First, arguments from Scripture simply based on passages denouncing homosexual erotic acts will not convince because the conversation in the ACC doubts that these passages refer to same-sex physical acts of intimacy in a faithful, monogamous, life-long gay relationship in which the gay couple seeks the Church’s involvement and blessing. Second, the current conversation will be unaffected by any argument that shows that such gay relationships are outside of the imagination or intention of the Scriptural witness and the weight of the Tradition. The only theological argument against SSB that will have currency in the ACC today will be one that acknowledges Christian gay couples living in a manner analogous to heterosexual marriage, who are devoted to a life of discipleship in the Anglican Church and who seem to bear spiritual fruit in the offering of themselves to the service of God and others.

## **The only possible theological argument remaining for those opposed to SSB**

This means that the onus of argument has shifted 180 degrees. No longer is it the proponent of SSB that must show a Scripture-based theological argument to convince the Church to initiate the practice as an innovation supported by a careful discernment of a legitimate development of doctrine. Rather, it is the contrary side that now must demonstrate that in the light of the presence of apparently faithful same-sex couples in the Church, these couples are disobeying God’s will by living together in a manner analogous to heterosexual marriage. That is, the only significant case against SSB possible in the ACC today is one that shows that these gay relationships in the ACC today are incompatible with, and contrary to, Scripture and Tradition.

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10. A few dioceses in the ACC have allowed the blessing of civilly married gay couples.

11. Eugene Rogers, Jr., professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. One of the first of a series of articles and talks on this theme appeared in *The Christian Century*, June 15, 2004,. The article begins: I WANT TO CONSIDER gay marriage by first reflecting on the theology of marriage, and I want to reflect on the theology of marriage under the rubric of sanctification. This approach is consistent with the tradition of the Orthodox Church, which regards marriage as a way of participating in the divine life not by way of sexual satisfaction but by way of ascetic self-denial for the sake of more desirable goods. Theologically understood, marriage is not primarily for the control of lust or for procreation. It is a discipline whereby we give ourselves to another for the sake of growing in holiness — for, more precisely, the sake of God.

## First objection to the assumptions of the present conversation: gay ain't nothin' new!

Many opponents of SSB will disagree with my paper thus far and will say that I have already given away the farm in describing the present state of the conversation. For these persons the notion of “gay” carries a weight that ought to be resisted. First of all, “gay” suggests the contemporary claim that same-sex orientation is a modern notion unknown in the ancient world. The reasoning thus concludes that Saint Paul does not address sexual behaviour related to the loving intimacy of gays, but could only be condemning homosexual behaviour that is an instance of pederasty or child abuse.<sup>12</sup> To claim that same-sex orientation is a “modern notion” is sheer nonsense. I know that this is a strong statement but the statement is made so often as a matter of fact that “same-sex orientation” was unknown to the Biblical writers that this notion must be corrected. Any one who has read Plato’s *Symposium* (5th century BCE) knows that the ancients were well acquainted with adult same-sex life-long love, and that same-sex desire was acknowledged to be part of the character of some persons. Aristophanes’ speech is a beautiful and touching evocation of homosexual love, as a union of two souls that would be one forever.<sup>13</sup>

## Second objection to the assumptions of the present conversation: we don't live in Paradise!

Second, not only is the term “gay” misleading because of the myth it bears that sexual orientation is a modern notion, “gay” also carries the nuance that same-sex orientation has been scientifically shown to be a biological category that belongs to the essential understanding of our humanity. Many opponents of SSB insist that there has been no such scientific proof. Further, and more to the point perhaps, even if science discovered a biological link between a specific gene, configuration of the brain, etc. that would allow science consistently to predict homosexual desire in an individual, such a physiological cause would not suggest that “God made the homosexual that way.” Because of the theological reality of the Fall of humankind, all of nature bears witness to the fallen character of the created order. A person might be born with any one of countless chromosomal configurations. It is cruel to suggest, for example, that a person born with a chromosomal configuration that leads to early death, or to a lifetime of low functioning intellect, was “made that way by God.” The way we find ourselves in chromosomal make-up is not “right or wrong,” but simply the physical, intellectual and emotional condition in which we are born and we are shaped in our early years. There is no “judgment” attached. In the context of both the potential and limitation of our physiology our moral life develops as we make decisions about how we relate to the world around us, to other persons, and to God. It is often said that ten percent of the population has unalterable homosexual desire, another one in fifteen-hundred are intersexual, one in ten-thousand males and one in thirty-thousand females are transsexual, and so on. These scientific facts say nothing at all about God’s plan for humankind. We cannot discern God’s plan for his creation, or for any part of that creation, simply by how we find ourselves, nor by the use of unaided reason alone.

Rather, to know God’s plan for humankind, we must turn to the divine revelation of God in Jesus Christ as reflected in Holy Scripture. And clearly God’s plan that we find in Scripture must include a Love for all persons regardless of sexual orientation, along with an account of how all persons can respond to that Love and be found in Him eternally.

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12. See Bishop Michael Ingham’s comments as quoted by Michael Valpy’s article on the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, Thursday, 8 March 2007 — “Bishop demands ‘better theology’ of sex.” Bishop Ingham is said to deny that the ancient world knew about homosexual love, and is quoted: “St. Paul understood same-sex relationships only in terms of the older-man and younger-boy relationship of the Greeks, which we call pederasty, or in other words child abuse.”

13. In quoting the *Symposium* here I am not suggesting that Plato is promoting same-sex relationships — Aristophanes’ speech is criticized for its failure to appeal to the transcendent. Nonetheless same-sex desire and relationships are described without qualification.

## “Gay” is here to stay in the conversation in the ACC today

But since I am committed to engaging in the current conversation of the ACC I will continue to use the word “gay” in spite of the reasonable objections of some opponents of SSB to the term. By “gay person” I simply mean an adolescent or adult who has a same-sex orientation: i.e. an attraction and desire for same-sex persons such that they are able to enter into intimate bonds of relationship only with persons of the same-sex.

In the rest of this paper I simply point to where an argument against SSB might be found. First, I shall outline in the briefest way that the Scriptural revelation of salvation for humankind restricts sexual acts of intimacy within the context of heterosexual marriage and generally for purposes of procreation. Second, I shall suggest how both gay and straight persons can live obediently in response to God’s eternal Love for us.

## The creation of man and woman: complementarity in the Book of Genesis

The early chapters of Genesis include clear notions of complementarity and procreation that become foundational for the notion of marriage throughout Scripture (including Romans 1) and equally throughout the history of the Christian Tradition. Indeed, our Lord pointed to the opening chapters of Genesis as illuminating the practice of marriage in his day (St Matthew 19:3-15). Inasmuch as Christians have disagreed about aspects of the practice of marriage through the centuries, all Christian tradition has followed the example of Christ in turning to these same chapters of Genesis as a primary source and measure of the theological understanding of marriage. In Genesis God crowns the act of creation with creatures made in His image and likeness. God creates “Adam” (singular), and creates *them* (plural) male and female (1:26), and blesses them that they may be fruitful and multiply. In a somewhat different way, the unity and complementarity described in the first chapter of Genesis is also indicated in the second. There Adam names the other animals as he goes searching among them for one like himself in answer to God’s purpose to create “a helper fit for him” (2:20). God names “Adam.” And when Adam awakes to discover Eve, he names her as his equal. “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...” (2:23). All this is recalled in the exhortation to the Marriage liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer when we read that marriage was “instituted by God in the time of man’s innocency.”

## The Fall: disobedience and shame

Genesis 3 describes how Adam and Eve yield to the serpent’s temptation: a spiritual pride leads to disobedience. The consequences of such disobedience had been foretold by God: immediate spiritual death and eventual physical death for humankind. Not only is their relationship with God corrupted, but likewise they are known especially in their changed relationship (3:16-19). What had been created good and given for joy, disobedience has made the occasion of sorrow and agony.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, shame enters a relationship in which there had been no shame. Adam and Eve must hide from one another and from God. Henceforth they live in exile from the original union in which the distinction and complementarity between male and female did not obscure their essential likeness as creatures of earth made in the image of God. In this way Genesis describes and interprets theologically the common experience of the human race and the yearning of the human soul to find companionship in the other, created by God for this purpose.

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14. Gen 3.16-19: “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’ And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’”



## The autonomous rational individual: complementarity re-defined and marriage re-imagined

Today most of western culture rejects the Biblical understanding of the relationship between male and female as rooted in the Genesis images of an original likeness, distinction, and complementarity. The integrity of individuals, whether male or female, is no longer understood as requiring a fulsome relationship to God and to the other, but the integrity of the human person is rather understood as the autonomous rational individual as complete and whole — seeking a partner with whom to enter into a contractual relationship whereby each partner will achieve a measure of happiness through the loving devotion of the other. This new understanding of the person as an autonomous individual leads to a view of marriage very different from that of the Christian tradition. Such a secular view of marriage, dominant in Canada today, is rooted in the yearning for a relationship that will bring happiness, joy, and fulfillment to each of the two autonomous individuals. This happiness, joy, and fulfillment is almost universally sought in a relationship that includes sexual intimacy, within or outside of marriage. Further there is no reason in this secular understanding of contractual marriage that the individuals involved be of different genders. This secular teaching of the stand-alone integrity of the autonomous individual has informed contemporary Canadian culture to such an extent that it has shaped the thinking of most members of the ACC and has led to the subsequent rejection of the Biblical teaching of complementarity.<sup>15</sup>

### But only male/female complementarity gives coherence to the Biblical witness of marriage

It cannot be contested that the Scriptural images of marriage begin with gender complementarity. Throughout the Old Testament, God consistently rejects the cults of fertility to which the people of Israel are tempted, yet He is clear that the union with Himself that He wills for his people is a fruitful one. The fruit is holiness or sanctity, and the call to holiness is the measure of all other forms of fruitfulness and the context in which they are understood and lived out. The images of marriage are extensive and cannot be referenced and considered here. They are also sometimes strikingly sexual, as in *The Song of Songs*, but always male/female. In the astonishing story of the prophet Hosea, he is called to be a sign of God's faithfulness to an unfaithful people by marrying a prostitute and having children with her. Through the prophet God declares to His people, "I am your husband." That is, in the Book of Hosea, God identifies Himself as the one who will make His people truly fruitful. In Him alone is found what is blindly sought in unfaithfulness. At the root of this unfaithfulness is turning their desire towards other gods, spiritual and earthly. The people of Israel broke their Covenant vows of faithful love (through obedience to the Law) and forgot the love of God that had been made known to them especially by the great act of deliverance by which He brought them out of slavery in Egypt and into a promised land. In the seventh and eighth chapters of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Solomon takes Wisdom, a feminine image of the divine Word, as his bride, reversing the male/female imagery, but still referring to that divine-human union as marriage.

These images are taken up in the New Testament as keys to understanding who Jesus is and the relationship between God and His people. The Gospel begins with stories of the barren giving birth through miracle: Elizabeth

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15. Since the debate over SSB has begun there has been a concerted effort to re-interpret Genesis in ways that define complementarity as not dependent upon the male/female distinction. Such interpretations argue that the gender of the "companion" sought by Adam is of no relevance. These strained interpretations run against the entire history of Biblical interpretation and are counter to any plain reading of the text.

bears John and Mary bears Jesus. In St John's Gospel Jesus directly takes up the images of marriage and fruitfulness. His first miracle is at a wedding — a sign that He is Israel's divine Husband, come to turn the water of disobedience to the wine of intimate and loving union in obedience (chapter 2). From the union of divinity (Divine Word) and humanity in the Person of Jesus springs a new birth (chapter 3). The spiritual children born of this "marriage" or union will include even Samaritans (chapter 4). John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the bridegroom (3:29). Jesus refers to himself explicitly as the bridegroom when explaining why his disciples do not fast (Mt 9:15; Mk 2:19; Lk 5:34). Jesus uses parables of invitations to a wedding feast of a king's son (Lk 14:7-11; Mt 22:2-14) and of wise virgins ready for marriage (Mt 25:1-13) to describe the kingdom of heaven. The union of Christ with His Bride is made possible by the Cross, and consummated and made fruitful in that faith which recognizes in the holy mysteries of Water and Blood His own life opened to the unworthy (Jn 19:32-37). In both the letters of St Paul and the Apocalypse, the Church turns toward Christ in expectant prayer as a Bride looking to her Bridegroom in response to His call. Thus the images of marriage found throughout the Bible constantly refer back to the early chapters of Genesis and interpret these chapters as requiring the male/female union that holds open the possibility of fecundity that informs the Biblical notions of union, sacrifice, and holiness. The fifth chapter of Ephesians describes marriage between a man and a woman as a reflection of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

To summarize: the whole of Scripture from its beginning in earthly paradise to its culmination with the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem adorned as a bride ready for her bridegroom (Revelation 19:7-9: "Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.") describes God's purposes of uniting us with him in a bond of spiritual marriage — that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us. Earthly marriage points to this divine purpose if it is so consecrated (i.e. if it is Christian marriage) through its openness to bearing fruit in procreation, through the complementarity of the relation between a man and a woman, and by revealing Christ-like love.<sup>16</sup>

## Procreation

Thus the Christian notion of marriage rooted in Scripture as consistently interpreted in the tradition of the Church reflects a theology of marriage that requires a man/woman complementarity that excludes the marriage of same-sex couples because sexual intimacy must be open to bearing fruit in procreation. This is not to say that every act must

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16. It is important to add that for Christians, a clear alternative suggested in Scripture is the single life consecrated to God. It is also meant to point to this spiritual marriage and, while it may be a more or less powerful witness depending on the individual, it is nonetheless a more explicit witness, since *in heaven they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage but will be like the angels.*

be open to procreation. The use of contraceptives in marriage for the purpose of family planning and proper stewardship of the created order is consistent with the notion that the three goods of marriage as described in the Anglican tradition (procreation, mutual up-building of one another in a permanent relationship, and the sanctification of the sexual act in a relationship of exclusive fidelity) can serve one another as a whole, but all three goods must be present within the totality of the relationship. Sometimes it is said that theologians who insist on procreation as an essential element in marriage define procreation in a very narrow way. This is not necessarily the case. Couples, both straight and gay, “bear fruit” in many holy ways, giving “new life” and hope to the human community by their witness of love, faithfulness and a life of sacrifice and service to others: all to the glory of God. Nevertheless Scripture does point to a specific type of procreation that is possible only between a man and a woman — a procreation that is a participation with God within the created order whereby the created order renews itself through the institution of marriage.

## The status of the Old Testament Law for Christians<sup>17</sup>

Another paper in this series deals with the New Testament witness against SSB (Stephen Andrews, “Is There a Natural Reading of Romans 1.24-27?”) but I want to say a word about the Old Testament witness. The Anglican Reformers in the 16th century thoughtfully clarified the Anglican Church’s teaching about the Law in the Old Testament in Article VII of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. In keeping with the previous universal tradition of the Church, Article VII carefully and correctly describes three kinds of laws in the Old Testament. Two of these types of law are not binding upon Christians, viz. the laws related to “Ceremonies and Rites” (such as laws governing sacrifices and laws related to purity — food laws, washings, circumcision etc.), and the laws of “Civil precepts” (how a society orders itself). But the third category of law, “Moral Law,” is binding. Article VII reads: “no Christian... whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.”

The Moral Law of the Old Testament is a reflection of Natural Law that is a reflection of Eternal Law. In the Christian tradition the source of all just law is ultimately God (Eternal Law) and God reveals that law to humanity, even prior to revelation in Scripture, by Natural Law. This is not what is meant by what today we call “the laws of Nature” discerned by scientists, but Natural Law is what is imprinted on every human soul by general revelation.<sup>18</sup> St. Paul, speaking of those who are not Jews or not converts to Christianity, speaks of Natural Law when he says, “When Gentiles who have not the law (the Law of Moses) do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness” (Rom 2:14-15). Of course certain instances of the application of the Moral law might be particular to a culture and time, but it cannot be thus concluded that all particular Moral laws of the Old Testament are “culture relative” as is often claimed. Some Moral laws are true in all times and places as concrete articulations of universal Natural Law. The Moral laws of the Old Testament are summed up in the Ten Commandments (received directly by Moses from God) and are in turn summed up by Jesus in the two great Commandments. “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (Mk 12.29-31).

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17. I am dependant upon an unpublished paper by the Rev’d David Phillips upon which he based his presentation for the Intentional Listening Group on Sexuality of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, for bits of the remainder of this paper. Father Phillips is the Rector of the Parish of Petite Riviere and New Dublin, Nova Scotia.

18. Human cooperation with Natural Law is commonly described as the participation by the rational creature in the Eternal Law.

In the current controversy in the Church, people have approached the question of the interpretation of the law in Leviticus — “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman ...” (18:22) — in one of three ways:

- 1) They have tried to show that this moral law, while binding, does not speak to the modern question of sexual relations within a committed monogamous life-long same-sex union.<sup>19</sup> This is an appropriate question to raise, and consistent in the understanding of the Law within the Anglican tradition and the wider Church, i.e. that the moral law *is* binding on Christians.
- 2) Another approach has been to try to undermine the Law of Moses generally in one of the following ways:
  - (a) Some bring up a law from “Ceremonies and Rites” (e.g. don’t eat shellfish) or “Civil precepts” (e.g. put adulterers to death) and then say that since we don’t follow that law, why should we follow this law. Although this reasoning often appears in editorial letters to the Anglican Journal or at the microphone at Synod gatherings, it is declared to be a false argument by the historic universal church: Article VII was written precisely to help people see that rejection of the ceremonial law or civil precepts does not affect the legitimacy of the Moral Law.
  - (b) Some say that as followers of Jesus we are Gospel people who no longer follow any part of the Law. This reasoning is called Antinomianism, and it is condemned both within the New Testament and throughout Church history.
- 3) A third approach, accepted by many, is to suggest that this particular law (“a man shall not lie with a man as with a woman”) may be true as it always has been simply read by Jews and Christians until the past few decades, and that this law is a gift to us, not a curse.

A plain reading of both the Old and the New Testaments condemns same-sex physical intimacy. But that cannot be the end of the matter. For this “plain reading” of Leviticus to become convincing, the task of the theologian is to articulate why and how it is the case that abstinence from same-sex intimate physical acts by gays is a *gift*, for from our modern perspective it seems to be a *curse* for those who have same-sex desire.

## Then what about same-sex couples whose love and partnership bear the marks of the Spirit?

That is, we must ask *why* same-sex physical intimacy is forbidden by Scripture in same-sex unions that are analogous to marriage and which seem to bear the fruit of the Spirit,<sup>20</sup> Archbishop Rowan Williams gave an address in 1989 called “The Body’s Grace”<sup>21</sup> that has been described as representing “the best 10 pages written about sexuality in the twentieth century.”<sup>22</sup> In this article he outlines five features of a relationship involving sexual intimacy that is nurturing and brings about growth: that it is a relationship with another (he describes why masturbation is not helpful);

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19. See Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, pp. 235-239, where she argues that this law is related to the condemning of male temple prostitution that was practiced by other nations surrounding Israel. While the law refers to cult practices, there is no reason to suppose that this prohibition is limited to acts committed within an idolatrous cult.

20. “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” — Galatians 5:22–23.

21. Reprinted in Williams, R.D., “The Body’s Grace,” in *Theology and Sexuality*, Eugene Rogers (ed.) (England, Blackwell Publishing) 2002, pp 309-321,

22. This is the judgment of Eugene Rogers, editor of *Theology and Sexuality*, *ibid*, p 309.

that there should be recognition of a certain risk involved, a vulnerability which enables one to be changed by the perceptions of the other; that there must be a mutuality in that relationship with the other (free of power over the other etc.); that the commitment of marriage enables the couple to “have a certain freedom to ‘take time’ to mature and become as profoundly nurturing as they can be;” and that ultimately, for the relationship to be healthy requires that the couple also know that they are loved by God. Surely Williams eloquently articulates here the majority view of members of the ACC in this listing of the “good” of a relationship that includes sexual intimacy.

Moreover, since all these characteristics are present in faithful, monogamous life-long same-sex unions it is not surprising that Williams concludes as follows:

In a church that accepts the legitimacy of contraception, the absolute condemnation of same-sex relations of intimacy must rely either on an abstract fundamentalist deployment of a number of very ambiguous texts, or on a problematic and non-scriptural theory about natural complementarity ...<sup>23</sup>

In other words, if procreation is no longer seen as an aspect of sexual intimacy in heterosexual marriage, there is no legitimate argument against SSB. Many theologians who disagree with SSB would concur with Williams that as soon as sexual acts are divorced from any notion of physical procreation, the argument against same-sex physical acts is hopelessly weakened. Only an understanding of the meaning of sex acts as generally open to physical procreation<sup>24</sup> can restore the integrity of the Scriptural argument, and the Scriptural notion of complementarity as indicated above. If sexual activity is de-linked from the possibility of procreation, then it is difficult to imagine how it is reasonable to expect same-sex Christian couples to be celibate.

Indeed, our difficult question can be broadened. In the New Testament it seems that everyone is called to a chaste life. If you are not married you are not to have sex, if you are married you are free to have sexual relations if you are open to procreation, and lustful thoughts are to be put to death by all. How can this be good news? Only if somehow this chastity makes possible the life for which we were knit together in our mother’s womb and born into this world: to live in the Life of God the Holy Trinity.

In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, in Purgatory, he describes in an allegorical way, the experience of purging that he believes must happen in our lives on earth if we are to be purified in heart to see God. He constructs a mountain in his poem with seven cornices on which are people who are struggling with a particular sin (one cornice for each of the seven deadly sins). In the highest and last cornice on the mountain, these folk are being purged of lust; their loves are being perfected, so they can enter earthly paradise. The three categories of people are married couples seeking to be chaste, those with heterosexual lust and those with homosexual lust — i.e. no one is left out! The groups run in opposite directions (signifying their different kinds of excessive desire) and when they meet, they kiss one another — those with heterosexual lust kiss those with homosexual lust, and then part from each other recalling an example of violators of the particular law that they had broken or might break if they are not careful. What is wonderful here is the leveling that Dante brings to this — there is no hypocrisy here, they are all in the same boat, there is a mutual recognition that all are struggling, there is a mutual love of each other shown in the kiss, they have all come to love God’s law which is being written on their hearts, and all are just about to make their way to paradise, together.

This image from the 13th century seems remarkably modern: Dante tells us that whether same-sex or other-sex desire, we are all seeking the same thing: chastity to bring us to the Kingdom of God to live in God forever. Chastity is everybody’s business because it is linked to our spiritual growth. The path of spiritual growth to the heights is a

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23. “The Body’s Grace,” p. 320.

24. Or in a relationship that is generally open to physical procreation — not every sexual act must be for the purpose of procreation, but such acts have their place only within a husband/wife relationship that is generally open to procreation.

well worn path, though narrow, one that has been laid out for us through the centuries by the theologians and the mystics who have gone before us — it is not unknown and it has a characteristic shape which comes to us from a careful reading of the Scriptures. Jesus calls us to divine perfection — *you must be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt 5:48). But we see in Christ's promise of the Spirit in John the idea of growth towards that perfection — the disciples could not bear all the truth about themselves and about God but the Spirit would draw them, as they were able, into all truth (16:12f). Jesus tells us that loving obedience to him leads us to the vision of God. "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21).

St. Paul, speaking to baptized and converted Christians often makes these distinctions: between babes in Christ and the mature; between those who are still carnally minded and those who are spiritual; between the new creation being formed in them and that which is dying away; between the old Adam and the new man; between the outer man and the inner. Growth in holiness, our sanctification, is a major teaching of the Epistles. "Work out your salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12); "this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (Phil 2:13); "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess 4:7); "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).

Progress along this spiritual journey to God requires our passions to be reordered so that all our earthly loves are "taken up" (not denied, but re-directed) into our love for God. James says, "What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:1-3).

## Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

The desire of same sex couples to receive a Blessing from the Church and perhaps even to exchange eternal vows of fidelity before God in the Church is a wonderful testimony to a commitment to their life in God. Their intent is to journey deeper into the life of God in a relationship that is supported and sanctified by Christ's Holy Catholic Church. Those who oppose SSB in the ACC today are suggesting that in such deep and loving gay relationships, same-sex physical acts of intimacy must be sacrificed for the Kingdom of God. In that sacrifice of physical acts of intimacy, as difficult as it will be, their true love, both for each other and for God, will be found.

Whether straight or gay, if we stay in the lusts of the flesh and try to serve or satisfy them, we will get stuck in those earthly lusts and not be able to lift up our hearts and see God. Heterosexuals who marry must seek to become chaste in their marriage. Heterosexuals outside marriage must seek celibacy. Likewise, single gays must seek celibacy. This paper has tried to be true to those who oppose SSB in the Church and who are making a real attempt to enter the present conversation in love. For these persons, the entire weight of Scripture and the overwhelming witness of the Tradition of the Church teach that same-sex physical intimacy is not permitted. These persons remain convinced that even in faithful, life-long same-sex relationships which are lovely and beautiful, the two gay partners must seek to be celibate in that relationship, offering their desire to its true end, towards God and the building up of same-sex friendships that are fruitful because they remain chaste.

Ask, and it shall be given you;  
Seek, and ye shall find....  
(Matthew 7:7)

## Conclusion

The debate about SSB in the ACC has many dimensions, of which the theological is but one. Ecumenical and inter-faith relations, the unity of the Anglican Communion, fellowship in the ACC, the relevancy of the ACC to Canadian culture and societal norms, pastoral concerns, Canadian law, the concept of human rights especially as described in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, are just a few of other considerations that play a part in the overall conversation and debate. In this paper we have restricted ourselves to theological concerns.

The whole of Scripture from its beginning in earthly paradise to its culmination with the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem adorned as a bride ready for her bridegroom describes God's purposes of uniting us with him in a bond of spiritual marriage — *that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us*. The Christian understanding of earthly marriage points to this divine purpose if it is consecrated through its openness to bearing fruit in procreation, through the complementarity of the relation between a man and a woman.

I realize that there is no sustained argument in this paper but only a pointing toward the type of theological argument that might be possible in the conversation in the ACC today. Such a sustained theological argument must recognize the current conversation in the ACC, acknowledge the presence of many gay relationships within the Church community, and directly engage the thinking of those who offer a theological rationale for SSB. Such a theological argument against SSB must not simply appeal to authority, but give a reasoned account for the truth that is found within our authoritative texts of Scripture and the authority of Christian tradition itself. Theological thinking seeks to discern and articulate Christian truth so that revealed truth might be not only believed, but also known and understood. In the current debate it is the responsibility of those who oppose SSB to provide a theological reasoning and clear articulation of their position so that the theological thinking of all members of the ACC might be challenged to appreciate the proper weight of such an argument against SSB.