

Epilogue

In conclusion, our work sustains one generally accepted observation and adds several doctrinal and practical considerations to the broader discussion. It is generally accepted that differing hermeneutical presuppositions produce conflicting readings of the same texts. This is not a matter of how highly one or another holds the authority of Scripture but the lens through which it is read. Hermeneutical clarity and integrity, difficult as it is, would seem to be of great help in future scriptural analysis.

Further, our collective voice perhaps highlights several pneumatological loci. One is the role of the Spirit in bringing the church into all truth (John 16:13). Can we ever be certain that the witness of the Spirit that we perceive to be working among us is not our own voice writ large rather than the voice of the Holy Spirit? Further, should that caution prevent the church from acting in some circumstances?

A second pneumatological concern arises from the belief that the Spirit guides us in the holiness of life that Paul develops in Romans and I Corinthians. The question here is what constitutes a holy sexual life and what role ought marriage to play in regulating it. This issue pertains to many people, among whom homosexuals are no doubt the minority. The liberal document herein offers a theology of marriage from one perspective. Perhaps further pneumatological reflection on sexual holiness is warranted given the radically changed sexual mores of the northern hemisphere and the reality that marriage seems to be fading among heterosexuals in various parts of the world.

Should the Episcopal Church seriously consider the liberal proposal for reimagining marriage, practical questions would also arise. The new practice would raise the question of the relationship between ordination and marriage across the board. For instance, the Episcopal Church has been ordaining and consecrating non-celibate homosexuals because marriage is not legally available to them. Would that practice be called into question if the Episcopal Church normalized same-sex marriages? The examination of candidates for the priesthood and the diaconate has ordinands pledge to be “a wholesome example to your people” (1979 *BCP*, 532) and “to all people” (1979 *BCP*, 544). Would marriage become required for ordination for

all non-celibate persons so that the wholesomeness that they embody would surely include sexual holiness? That is, would sexual scrutiny need to become part of the ordination process regardless of orientation for the sake of consistency?

A further issue would arise. In the United States, the minister validates the marriage on behalf of the state and then calls on the Spirit in the nuptial blessing. What would be the status of nuptially blessed couples in states that do not authorize or recognize same-sex marriage? In that case, what would be the difference between same-sex marriages and blessing rites?

While the Episcopal Church has responded to questions and requests put to it by the “instruments of unity” over the past seven years, it has not until now invited its theologians and scholars to tackle the theological and doctrinal issues at stake in this great debate. As professionally trained theologians, historians, and exegetes, we often become absorbed in the debates in our various fields and subfields and sit on the sidelines without much role in the church’s self-reflection. We are grateful that the House of Bishops has a Theology Committee on which professional theologians sit, and we are all honored to have been invited to bring our offerings to the table. We pray that our work may contribute to the well-being of the body of Christ.

Almighty Father, whose blessed Son before his passion prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one: Grant that your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to you, may be united in one body by the one Spirit, that the world may believe in him whom you have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (1979 *BCP*, 255)

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