

Augustine, Scripture, and eschatology: a reply to the ATR's respondents

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As part of its "Conversation on Marriage and the Church," the *Anglican Theological Review* solicited three responses to the paper "Marriage in Creation and Covenant: a Response to the Task Force on the Study of Marriage," by John Bauerschmidt, Wesley Hill, Jordan Hylden, and me. As one of its authors, I would like to begin by thanking the three respondents, Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Scott MacDougall, and Kathryn Tanner, for their substantive comments. This sort of dialogue on marriage is all too rare. At the same time, it seems necessary to offer a response, not least because they have asked questions of us. I will begin with some general remarks regarding their responses, before addressing several specific concerns.

The three responses are quite different and raise issues or concerns with our essay that are not entirely compatible with each other. For example, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski recognizes our point that any Anglican treatment of the issue of marriage must begin from within the Western tradition, which is heavily indebted to Augustine; MacDougall's desire that we had plundered a huge variety of other resources (the Eastern tradition, liberation theology, pragmatism, phenomenology, "the rich contemplative tradition," and material from classical Anglicanism) is rather different. I take it merely as an impressive gesture towards potential methodological diversity, rather than a substantive objection: a catholic theology doesn't just begin anywhere, say with Merleau-Ponty, the French philosopher of the hour. But the responses share a few common features that I shall address, such as a concern over issues that we did not address, as well as over our treatment of Augustine and Ephesians 5.

The three responses' common objections: unaddressed issues, Augustine, Scripture

First of all, I want to note the substantive character of some of the issues raised by our respondents that we did not address in our essay. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, for example, brings up adoption, in-vitro fertilization, and "non-procreative families, both same-sex and heterosexual."¹ MacDougall desires a further account of gender and, as I noted, perhaps a fuller consideration of various other philosophical and theological positions: from liberation theology to the Anglican classics.² Tanner clearly wants some further treatment of the issue of adoption and perhaps of celibacy, among many other concerns.³ Essentially, all of these responses are reasonable, and I readily concede that more material is desirable. But I am afraid we have already noted this point. As we signaled at the end of our essay (MCC 19), "we have not had the space to address a variety of objections" or issues in our initial offering. One cannot say everything all at once, and the respondents are, to a certain degree, simply asking us to do what we have already said we will do. This is why we have begun the project *Fully Alive: Love, Marriage, and the Christian Body*. I can only ask for patience and continued help or engagement.

Second, I find it both heartening, as well as amusing, that all three essays have responded to us by returning to Augustine. It is heartening because, as we stated in our paper and as Joslyn-Siemiatkoski noted also, Augustine is the primary font of Western nuptial theology.⁴ But, for precisely the same reason, this move is amusing: we did not simply invoke Augustine as paradigmatic (as if we decided it was so while writing our essay), but we noted a whole Western *tradition* on marriage that takes Augustine as paradigmatic, pointing to a few key publications that

¹ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Another Look at Marriage: An Historian's Response to 'Marriage in Creation and Covenant,'" pp. 4-5.

² Scott MacDougall, "Three Questions for the Authors of 'Marriage in Creation and Covenant,'" pp. 2-4.

³ Kathryn Tanner, "A Rejoinder to 'Marriage in Creation and Covenant,'" p. 4, note 13.

⁴ See MCC, pp. 11-12; Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Another Look at Marriage," pp. 1-2.

offer further details.⁵ We did not have the space to write at length on over 1,400 years' worth of literature to prove and explore this point: on the historic liturgies, on papal decretals, on various medieval canonists and jurists, or on theologians like Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Jewel, Barth, and John Paul II. Others have already done this and have filled many books with analyses of these authors. One of our primary critiques of the task force report was that it seemed not to acknowledge that there is a Western tradition on marriage or engage its sources; MacDougall and Tanner make a similar error, while imagining that we do. Perhaps we could have been clearer.

In many ways, this point answers each of the respondents' attempts to re-read Augustine and come up with counterproposals. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski thinks we wanted to offer "a final word" on Augustine, one heavily indebted to Ephraim Radner.⁶ So he offers a different one. MacDougall wants to show that we have replaced what Augustine meant by *sacramentum* with what the tradition read him as meaning.⁷ Tanner hopes to prove all sorts of fundamental misreadings and errors. But the paper was never asking "Did Augustine say x?" We raised the issue of "What does the Western Augustinian tradition *say as a whole*, and what is thus a credible retrieval of that whole tradition?" We believe we have responded coherently and fairly to the latter.

Third, all three respondents note the prominence we give to Ephesians 5, especially verse 32; they worry that we misunderstand its import regarding how marriage is a *sacrament* or icon of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski defers to the task force's reading of this passage; MacDougall defers to Ian MacFarland's reading, while citing a slightly misleading translation; Tanner has a larger concern I will address later.

I repeat initially a basic point: we did not simply argue that Ephesians 5:32 relates marriage to the union between Christ and the Church. None of the respondents notes the "foundational" prominence we gave to the creation narratives and their "canonical placement" as the opening to Scripture (MCC 13), perhaps for obvious reasons: these passages so clearly highlight the significance of sexual difference to any theology of marriage. Nor do our respondents seem to note that marriage and the marital relationship are repeatedly and explicitly an image for the relationship between God and Israel, Christ and the Church (e.g. Ezek. 16; Jer. 2:2; Hosea 1-2; Isa. 62:5; Matt. 22:1-14; Matt. 25:1-13; Mark 2:19-20; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7-9, 21:2, 21:9). The description of this relationship is not something that originated with, and may be settled by appeal to, one scriptural author; it is a golden thread running through the whole Bible. Thus, one cannot even begin by objecting that the thread of Paul's argument runs *from* marriage *to* the Christ/Church relationship, thus discrediting our position or the tradition's emphasis on seeing the two always together. As I shall note below, such an argument cannot even be made about Ephesians 5. Throughout Scripture, the thread runs both ways: the marriage of men and women colors our image of Christ and the Church, and the relationship between Christ and the Church chastens our image of marriage. Our respondents fail to note the ubiquity of the idea, and thus have a limited understanding of how this iconic relationship works itself out in Scripture, in the tradition, and in any nuptial theology.

Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski's proposals: context and procreation

I will deal with Joslyn-Siemiatkoski's specific points first, as his response is the most sympathetic, noting some deficiencies in the task force report and the need for further work. MacDougall and Tanner do not acknowledge the report in any way. While Joslyn-Siemiatkoski raises a number of issues, I will address only two here.

⁵ E.g. James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (1987); Philip Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church* (1994); John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract* (1994); and Christopher C. Roberts, *Creation & Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (2007).

⁶ Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Another Look at Marriage," p. 2.

⁷ MacDougall, "Three Questions," pp. 2-3.

First, he repeatedly brings up the issue of context. He believes we take Augustine's statements out of his late antique setting and simply apply them to the contemporary world without any adjustment. "The Augustinian tradition must be interpreted for this era."⁸ In its own way, this point might be a valid one, if he offered a sense of how Augustine's comments are so context-bound that they must be received differently today. In dealing with Augustine's context, he rightly notes that Augustine aimed his comments against both Manichaean anti-materialism and an overly rigorous Christian asceticism, affirming both the positive purpose of marriage and child-rearing, along with the ideal of celibacy. But are these not issues of serious contention today? I fail to see how Augustine's attempts to ward off heresies so affect his theology that it is irretrievable, save by an unclear method of application.

Second, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski gives an example of what he means about our context only when he raises contemporary issues: namely, he thinks that the difficulties presented by in-vitro fertilization, adoption, and non-procreative families mean that Augustine's focus on offspring must be reined in and redirected.⁹ Joslyn-Siemiatkoski engages in this task by effectively shearing off the good of children (*proles*) from the goods of fidelity and permanence (*fides, sacramentum*). This reconfiguration of the Augustinian goods arrives in the claim that the good of children is simply ordered towards the good of society at large and social fellowship among human beings.¹⁰

For Augustine, it is true that marriage was not instituted for procreation alone and that *children* are oriented towards the other goods of marriage and the broader good of human society.¹¹ But the three Augustinian goods are not so easily separable. Fidelity and the permanence of the marital bond *are also* oriented towards the bearing of offspring. This is so in Augustine's work, and it is patently obvious to most people. For Augustine (among others), it is clear that a married man and woman engaged in sexual intercourse over many years will, in the overwhelming majority of cases, have children together, unless they are unfaithful to each other, they do not render to each the marital "debt" (1 Cor. 7:1-5), or they attempt to prevent conception or birth by various means.¹² Augustine recognizes that unforeseen obstacles sometimes exist, such as impotence or barrenness, and he deals with those. Augustine spends rather less time speculating about what to do with the marriages of the elderly, or with marriages contracted without the intent to have children, perhaps rightly because these are not the norm and do not set the paradigm.

I should also note that it has become common to raise the objection of adoption, in-vitro fertilization, and surrogacy (the latter of which Joslyn-Siemiatkoski does not raise, for whatever reason). It has also become common to valorize adoption as an appropriate activity for Christians, perhaps more appropriate than procreation (according to Eugene Rogers). It is not my intention to address these in a fulsome way at this time. Along with being topics of some sensitivity, the issues involved are *fundamentally different* in each case and cannot be cited simply as stock objections. A lesbian or gay couple that opts for in-vitro fertilization or surrogacy or an elderly couple that marries late and decides to adopt are different from each other. Neither are they the same as a heterosexual couple that discovers, late in life and after years of struggle, that one or both is infertile. The issues are different. Nor, as Tanner seems to suggest, is an LGBT couple with children directly analogous to the Virgin Mary, Joseph, and the birth of Jesus Christ.¹³ Joseph is not a stepfather, the Holy Family is not an adoptive one, nor is God a cosmic sperm donor.

⁸ Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Another Look at Marriage," p. 3.

⁹ Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Another Look at Marriage," p. 1.

¹⁰ Tanner, "A Rejoinder," p. 5, engages in a similar move, though her claim that the goods of fidelity and the sacramental bond "trump" the good of offspring is a radical oversimplification of Augustine's position.

¹¹ E.g. Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*, p. 3.

¹² *On the Good of Marriage* 5, 6; *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, pp. 17, 19.

¹³ Tanner, "A Rejoinder," p. 4.

This is not to deny that there is good and grace in, for example, any couple (gay or straight) providing a home for an adopted child, or even some shadow of the good in contemporary methods of enhancing fertility. I would never deny that. Nor is this to take a position on how to welcome such families in the Church. But many of these methods represent a technologization and commercialization of reproduction and family building that is troubling and all too prone to abuse. We cannot address these issues in any facile manner, as if they are easy to reconcile with the Christian tradition or as if their mere existence calls it into question. Nor do I mean to dismiss them out of hand here. We hope to address these issues at greater length in another essay for *Fully Alive*, as I acknowledge I simply cannot do justice to them in a few short pages, nor do justice to the couples involved.

MacDougall's questions

Scott MacDougall's response is oriented around three questions:

1. Is the Augustinian framework of the authors permanent and necessary?
2. Are the scriptural bases of the authors' position convincing?
3. Is it true to affirm same-sex marriage is to advance a defective eschatology?

I have already dealt with the broad outlines of questions 1 and 2. As I noted, all three respondents try to skewer us on Augustine and Ephesians 5, even though our argument hardly rests on a single Church Father and a single biblical passage. But there are a few elements of MacDougall's essay that still require addressing.

First, MacDougall attempted to dismiss our point about the reception of Augustine by noting that Augustine has been read in many ways. This is a truism: of course he has. What MacDougall doesn't mention, however, is that it is not clear that Augustine's varied reception applies so well to the issue of how his nuptial theology was understood, and none of the works which he initially cites deal with the question at hand. The only relevant work he cites actually rules in our favor, if one understands our argument. MacDougall concedes: "Himes and Coriden state that later interpreters and the medieval canonists assigned to Augustine the *sacramentum* of marriage that the MCC authors are so certain is *the* Augustinian position."¹⁴ Well, precisely.

Second, MacDougall attempts to dismiss our account of Ephesians 5:32 primarily by appealing to the "plain sense of the text," as well as to Ian MacFarland's (and the task force's) view of it.¹⁵ I am most surprised by MacDougall's construal of the "plain sense" of Ephesians 5:32, based first of all upon emphasizing the somewhat misleading translation of the NRSV: "This is a great mystery, and *I am applying it* to Christ and the Church." MacDougall states that the text reasons *from* marriage *to* the union of Christ and the Church on the basis of this translation's reference to "application." If only the text were so direct and limiting! But it reasons back and forth between the two relationships, as the MacFarland article cited by MacDougall notes. MacDougall (and the task force authors who make the same point) have forgotten the first rule of exegesis: pay attention to context.

Rather than beginning with marriage and then applying it to Christ and the Church, most of Ephesians 5:22-30 reasons in the other direction, *from* the relationship of Christ and the Church *to* marriage. Only after doing so does Paul quote a particular biblical passage (Gen. 2:21) and say: "This is a great mystery, and I speak about Christ and the Church."¹⁶ This is not the same thing as MacDougall suggests. The two topics are inseparable; they are not addressed in some kind of rigid order.

¹⁴ MacDougall, "Three Questions," p. 3, citing Kenneth R. Himes and James A. Coriden, "The Indissolubility of Marriage: Reasons to Reconsider," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004), p. 493.

¹⁵ The articles by Carolyn Osiek and Sang-Wan (Aaron) Son are not concerned with the "plain sense" of the text or the *from-to* dynamic MacDougall argues for, but with all sorts of issues that I cannot resolve at the moment.

¹⁶ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν. ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν / *Sacramentum hoc magnum est; ego autem dico de Christo et ecclesia.*

MacDougall's third question to us concerns eschatology. The essence of his argument is that there might be a way to think about the resurrection body that escapes the clear significance given to "gender" in Ephesians 5 and in the creation narratives.¹⁷ He hopes to construct a view in which the "resurrection grammar of the Christian faith" remains important, to which current bodily practices may correspond. However, he begins by dodging the issue and simply claiming that the character of eschatology "explodes our efforts to describe it."¹⁸ He justifies this move by citing his own volume on eschatology and an article by John P. Manoussakis on eschatology and the Eucharist.¹⁹ He then states that, since the Episcopal Church has discerned the Pauline fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) in the lives of LGBT people, we can justify same-sex marriage.

How to respond? To begin with, MacDougall's volume came out only a few days ago.²⁰ Thus, as much as I look forward to reading what he has to say about eschatology, I'm afraid I cannot respond to it at the moment.²¹ But I can offer something regarding his use of Manoussakis, his appeal to the fruit of the Spirit, and his appeal to eschatology.

Manoussakis's main contention is that we ought to put eschatology at the forefront of our theology,²² and in this regard, I suspect that Manoussakis, MacDougall, and I are in agreement. Manoussakis is also concerned that the practice of the Eucharist be taken as a central organizing principle for contemporary theology.²³ Once again, I wouldn't disagree.

Manoussakis is concerned that contemporary theology not be reduced to "a form of patristic Talmudism, a merely philological collection and exegesis of patristic fragments."²⁴ I do not sympathize here with him (nor with his lightly veiled jab at the putative methods of orthodox Judaism). But I hardly think that contemporary Anglican theology, as it is practiced by me or anyone else, is in danger of falling into this pit: Manoussakis's main target is a particular kind of Eastern Orthodox theology.

The major place where we part ways, however, is in Manoussakis's (and, I suspect, MacDougall's) forwarding of the idea that eschatology, our account of the last things, displaces our sense of history and specifically our protology, our account of first things, along with their impact upon present practice.²⁵ This principle is deeply flawed, especially if is wielded uncritically like a cudgel. This is not least because our Lord's teaching on marriage and divorce was not limited by reference to either protology or eschatology, but to both. In respect to various questions about marriage and divorce, he makes reference both to the initial creation (Matt. 19:3-8) and to the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27). When it came to regulating present marriage, it is notable that his emphasis lay on the initial creation. We can only follow suit, even though the Christian life must always be led in light of the coming resurrection.

This is one reason why I cannot countenance MacDougall's minimalistic guidance for the present: namely, a nullification of nearly all other criteria for discernment by the citation of an empty eschatology, and an elevation of the fruit of the Spirit for determining the legitimacy of same-sex marriage.²⁶ There may be "no law against" the latter (Gal. 5:23), but, to paraphrase MacDougall, providence has granted us all sorts of "sound guidelines" for "the difficult work of

¹⁷ I note that he uses the term gender, rather than "sexual difference," a key marker in these discussions.

¹⁸ MacDougall, "Three Questions," p. 5.

¹⁹ Not just eschatology; MacDougall's citation is incomplete. John Panteleimon Manoussakis, "The Anarchic Principle of Christian Eschatology in the Eucharistic Tradition of the Eastern Church," *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007), pp. 29-46.

²⁰ At my time of writing, his volume was published only in the United Kingdom on May 21, 2015, and is available in the United States only for pre-order or as an e-book. Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

²¹ I will be reviewing it in *The Living Church* in the near future.

²² Manoussakis, "The Anarchic Principle of Christian Eschatology in the Eucharistic Tradition of the Eastern Church," pp. 29, 44-46.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-44. Ironically, for MacDougall, Manoussakis seems rather interested in Neoplatonism as well.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32, 45.

²⁶ MacDougall, "Three Questions," p. 5.

discernment,” which are not wiped out by a vague sense of the future. We are not limited to asking whether some set of relationships exhibits general qualities of love, respect, and fidelity (one could ask that of nearly any human relationship at any time in any place, ending up with a somewhat positive answer). We also do not have to ask only, as MacDougall suggests, whether the limited discernment of the Episcopal Church is legitimate enough to alter our account of marriage. We have an enormous number of resources in Scripture, in the tradition, in the Anglican Communion, and in our ecumenical partners, among other resources. And I suggest that we use the whole of them in that difficult work of retrieval that “generally repays the efforts.”²⁷

Tanner’s charges

Kathryn Tanner offers the most trenchant critique of “Marriage in Creation and Covenant,” purporting to show that none of the sources to which we appeal would argue that procreation is of primary importance to marriage. Her paper is also unnecessarily dismissive, going out of its way to label us “smug [and] hypocritical” with regard to suffering in general, as well as “self-congratulatory” regarding suffering in the birth and raising of children.²⁸ I can only attribute the latter points to an unnecessary set of suppositions about our personal biographies, marital statuses, and sexuality.

Among the most basic claims she makes is that, for Augustine, marriage is not primarily instituted for procreation. I acknowledge the difficulty of pinning Augustine down on this topic, but this is mostly because he tends to list *multiple* primary goods, not just one. As he says in *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 11, marriage was not established only for children or fidelity, but also for “a certain sacrament” or “a certain bond” (*quoddam sacramentum*), with reference to Ephesians 5:32. A broad reading of Augustine’s work shows that he hopes to find all three goods of marriage, ideally, which is why he works so hard to show that all three are present in the celibate union of Mary and Joseph. Again, this is why it is so difficult to remove one of his three goods; they are intertwined.

That said, I do not understand how Tanner fails to notice Augustine’s statements about children as *a* or even *the* primary good of marriage. Such a position can be easily found in the first chapter of *On the good of marriage*, when Augustine comments on the significance of sexual difference:

What follows from this is the connection of fellowship in children, who are the only honorable fruit, not of the union of male and female, but of sexual intercourse. For there could have been a kind of friendly and real union between *either* sex, one ruling and the other following, without such intercourse.²⁹

In other words, Augustine can imagine a kind of orderly human relationship or social union without sex, but he cannot imagine the institution of sex without its orientation towards children.

Similarly, Augustine labels procreative intercourse “the purpose for which marriage takes place” and labels it the only intercourse “worthy of marriage” (*On the Good of Marriage*, 8, 11) and “the proper end of marriage” (*On Marriage and Concupiscence* 16).³⁰ Even granting Tanner’s points about Augustine’s valuation of celibacy over marriage (and I grant it), there should be no doubt

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁸ Tanner, “A Rejoinder,” p. 6.

²⁹ *On the Good of Marriage* 1: *Consequens est conexio societatis in filiis, qui unus honestus fructus est non coniunctionis maris et feminae, sed concubitus. Poterat enim esse in utroque sexu etiam sine tali commixtione alterius regentis, alterius obsequentis amicalis quaedam et germana coniunctio.*

³⁰ This strikes also against a frequent contention of the one of the task force authors, both in print and online. Tobias Haller frequently attempt to separate the “purposes” of marriage from its “goods,” as described by Augustine. For Augustine, something’s good is precisely its purpose. For example, the good of the soul is God.

that Augustine views children as one of the primary purposes for which marriage was instituted, one of its inherent goals, and the only final purpose for the institution of sex. To deny this point is inconceivable.

Tanner objects to our emphasis on procreation for two other reasons as well. First, she makes the somewhat odd claim that, when speaking of the sacrament of marriage, we “associate the male-female procreative bond as a whole with Christ and their offspring with the Church.”³¹ Tanner is simply mistaken here about the claim we are making, and I can only guess why she came to this conclusion. Perhaps it derived from our reference to men *and* women giving themselves away in a love that imitates the self-offering of Christ, whereas Ephesians 5:25-27 focuses on men loving their wives in such a manner? But such an interpretation on Tanner’s part would mean applying a wooden hermeneutic to both the biblical text and ours. After all, at the beginning of Ephesians 5, we encounter a phrase familiar to most Episcopalians from an offertory sentence of the eucharistic liturgy: “Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1). The whole Church is meant to imitate Christ’s offering of love. This applies in marriage as well, to men and to women.

That said, the claim we make is more complicated and yet (in my mind) more obvious: we associate the male with Christ but the female *and* the offspring with the Church. As female and as offspring, the Church is one and many, both the Bride of Christ and, in her members, his children. Yes, we agree with Tanner that “the Church just *is* what Christ’s love generates,”³² but she fails to reckon with the full ramifications of this phrase.

Second, Tanner claims that this construal does not correspond well to the bond between Christ and the Church because she is unaware of any claim in Scripture and tradition that Christ and the Church have offspring. Indeed, she thinks that procreation is an improper analogy for our becoming the children of God. Although I am somewhat surprised by Tanner’s claim, I will take it at face value and happily provide some notes for someone who is “eager for enlightenment.”³³

The biblical foundations for such a view are not hard to find. Within the New Testament, Paul refers to “the Jerusalem above; she is free and she is a mother. For it is written, ‘Rejoice you childless one ... for the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married’” (Gal. 4:26-27). He is here citing Isaiah 54:1, a passage whose context makes it clear that the barren Israel will be married and bear children from her Maker.³⁴ Several of the biblical verses I have cited earlier, along with others, refer to Israel or Jerusalem as a mother with children: that is, a corporate body with her individual members or citizens (Ps. 87:5; Isa. 54:1-8; Ezek. 16:20-21, 43b-49; Lam. 1:5; Hosea 1:2-2:1). I note especially the image of Hosea’s adulterous wife, bearing children who are initially called “Not pitied” and “Not my people,” but then named “Children of the living God” and “My people” and “Pitied.” This is a prophetic tableau about the relationship between God and Israel, acted out between husband and wife. Does Tanner believe procreation is absent here?

The imagery is admittedly odd: we are the Church espoused to Christ, and yet we are the children of the Church, the heavenly Jerusalem; we are sons and daughters of the Zion espoused to the Lord, and yet we are also espoused to the Lord by our membership in Zion. But this seems no stranger than being the members of the body of Christ, as well as his spouse, while simultaneously being the stones in a temple of which he is the chief cornerstone or sharers in his holy priesthood. This variety of theological imagery is profoundly scriptural.

I am not now going to give a crash course in typological exegesis. Although Scripture is not “explicit” regarding the procreative relationship between Christ and the Church (unless one

³¹ Tanner, “A Rejoinder,” p. 2.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ And, of course, this is right after Paul himself claims to be “in labor pains until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

counts the Song of Songs: let the reader understand), Tanner's point about Christ and the Church *not* having children by procreation is hardly obvious, even within Scripture. Yes, we are adopted children (e.g. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). But we are also "born of God" (John 1:13), we are "born anew, not of perishable but imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23; cf. 1 John 3:9).

Within the tradition, this sort of language is so prevalent that it is hardly clear where to begin. St. Cyprian's famous line is an important foundation, even though he calls the Church a *virgin* bride: "No one can have God as his father who does not have the Church as his mother" (*On the Unity of the Catholic Church* 6). Basic imagery regarding the Church as our mother is easily found among the Church Fathers and even the Reformers, as Carl E. Braaten has noted.³⁵ More specifically, the imagery of Christ and the Church dwelling in a holy, fruitful union with children is discussed by Jerome in his *Commentary on Isaiah* 62:5. Jerome joins this verse on the marriage of Israel to the Lord with Ephesians 5:32 on Christ and the Church, along with a catena of other passages, in order to discuss their "holy union" (*sancta coniunctio*).³⁶

Similarly, Augustine takes it for granted that Christ and the Church have children; his imagery is not limited to that of adoption, as Tanner seems to think.³⁷ Augustine does not argue for this point in a sermon. He simply states:

Two parents begot us for death, two parents begot us for life. The parents who begot us for death are Adam and Eve. The parents who begot us for life are Christ and the Church. (*Sermon* 22.265-267)³⁸

The image of "Mother Church" becomes incredibly common from at least the fifth century onwards throughout the Church, as does baptism as a reference to the Church's "womb," though both are present before.³⁹ Gregory the Great takes things a step further in his *Homily* 2.3 on Ezekiel, commenting on the presence of "beds" or "alcoves" (*thalami*) in the vision of the restored Jerusalem Temple (Ezek. 40). Although he partially individualizes the nuptial relationship, his comments remain illuminating.

Let us consider what is usually done in a bed, and let us gather from it what is done by the Holy Church. In the marital bed, the bridegroom and bride are sealed together as in a pact, and joined to each other in love. What are the marriage beds in the Holy Church, except the hearts [of the bride and bridegroom], in which the soul is joined to the invisible bridegroom through love, that her desire may burn?

In commenting on John 16:21 ("When a woman is giving birth, she is sorrowful") the Venerable Bede says, "He refers to holy Church as a woman on account of her fruitfulness in good works and because she never ceases to beget spiritual children for God." This begetting is compared to

³⁵ *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (1998), 2-3.

³⁶ "As a youth dwells with a virgin, so shall your sons dwell with you. And it will come to pass that, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall the Lord rejoice over you." Among others: Ps. 19:5; Ps. 45:9; 2 Cor. 11:2.

³⁷ Tanner, "A Rejoinder," p. 2. Her point here is unclear, as she seems to both grant and deny the point about "spiritual procreation."

³⁸ *Duo parentes nos genuerunt ad mortem, duo parentes nos genuerunt ad uitam. Parentes qui nos genuerunt ad mortem, Adam est et Eua. Parentes qui nos genuerunt ad uitam, Christus est et ecclesia.* Cf. *Sermo* 26.1081.10-23 and 228.1-2.

³⁹ E.g. for the former, see Cassiodorus *Commentary on the Psalms* (throughout). For the latter, see Leo the Great, *Sermon* 24.3, 25.5, 63.6; Quodvultdeus, *On the Creed* 3.1.1-8. The latter imagery had been common among North African authors since the time of Cyprian. See Robin Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism*. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 105 (Leiden and Danvers, MA : Brill, 2011), pp. 249-251. Even more explicit language regarding "the seed of Christ" or "the seed" of baptismal water is noted by Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 240, 321, 666. I leave aside its ubiquitous use among heretical authors.

the “yeast” hidden by the woman in the meal (Luke 13:21), which is obtained by “the energy of love and faith from on high.”⁴⁰

I shall not exert myself in exploring the varied resonance of these patristic passages, and this survey is not an exhaustive examination of the topic. But it seems suitable for the purposes of this essay. There is more than a little merit to linking generation or procreation to the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Finally, Tanner is concerned that we link marriage with the cross and passion of Christ, as well as creation. “The crucifixion need not make an appearance here,” she says.⁴¹ Moreover, according to Tanner, the link we argue for somehow amounts to Christ “creating us for suffering’s sake.”⁴² I would simply label these incredible misreadings, if they weren’t so serious.

Regarding the former, Tanner is mistaken in her suggestion that we can remove the crucifixion from a theology of marriage and its sacramental character, even if she is concerned about how it may be linked to creation. Frankly, the context of Ephesians 5:32 will not allow it. The love that husbands are to show their wives is precisely that shown by Christ in the drama of salvation:

Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.

Tanner’s second concern, however, is both more serious and more difficult. If we truly made a link that imported suffering into eternity and our final salvation, I too would be concerned!⁴³ I agree with Tanner that God did not create us “for suffering’s sake.” But I think Tanner’s concern is immaterial; she has manufactured a problem by reading into paper various meanings that are not present.

It seems to me that Tanner is concerned with the connection between the following statements. We posited that “God created a world that he foreordained to draw to fulfillment in himself” (MCC 12). We said: “No fundamental opposition stands between nature and grace, creation and covenant” (MCC 11). Third, we spoke of marriage as a natural and a sacramental reality (MCC 12). Fourth, we highlighted marriage’s participation in the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church, linking procreation and labor to this mystery (MCC 3). We later added a point about “suffering procreative love,” that is, the natural good of marriage as it is expressed and experienced in the face of mortality, sin, and finitude (MCC 16). If one were to reason backwards in a particular kind of way, one might thus find a way to link what our paper says about suffering love to God’s purposes in creation and last things, to Christ as *arche* and *telos*. One might stress the link between its natural and sacramental reality further than we did. But we were not asserting precisely this sort of link. Perhaps we could have been clearer on this point in our original paper. But allow me to clarify my own position.

As a sacrament, marriage reflects the union of Christ and the Church, and it is clear from Ephesians 5 that this reflection is based upon the particular character of the one-flesh union of a man and a woman, as well as the love between them, which is naturally generative and which reflects Christ’s self-offering on the Cross. We might imagine that, in a world without sin, this union and love would be expressed apart from suffering; it would not bear the particular cruciform shape that we highlighted in “Marriage in Creation and Covenant” or that is evident in

⁴⁰ *Homily* II.13 (120). Bede also discusses the children of the church as children of preachers, similar to Paul’s mixing of metaphors in Galatians. See his *On the Song of Songs* 2.4.81-127

⁴¹ Tanner, “A Rejoinder,” p. 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴³ It is worth saying, however, that both she and I are facing an uphill battle on this question, as the suffering of God has become the new orthodoxy among many contemporary theologians, influenced either by process theology or by a putatively Pseudo-Dionysian account of *eros*.

Ephesians 5. This is what Augustine tries to imagine in his “blushingly prurient” investigation, as Tanner puts it.⁴⁴ But *this is not* a world without sin and its effects, nor do we know of one. God’s *caritas* towards us is revealed in the self-offering of the Son upon the Cross; the act that unites Christ and the Church forever was not accomplished without suffering. And we cannot expect a marriage that partakes of this love to be free of the Cross, not in this world.

This is not a denial that marriage involves pleasure, of course. We are not naive. And, after all, Christ’s betrothal of the Church to himself, as well as his current union with it, is not without pleasure and rejoicing, even if much of it is deferred to the final consummation of the last day (cf. Heb. 12:2). But to fail to account for suffering in our understanding of marriage as a sacrament, to imagine that we can write a theology of marriage that pole-vaults into a realm free of suffering, is misguided. Along with the whole creation that “groans in labor pains right up to the present time,” we “groan inwardly” and still await the “redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:22, 23). “Who hopes for what they already see?” (Rom 8:24)

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, I am grateful for the engagement of our three respondents, even if I have had some rather sharp words regarding their proposals and questions. We need this sort of substantive debate, rather than a quiet slide into new practices and theologies. However much we may feel we intuit the holy character of same-sex unions, the task of rigorously explaining and justifying such a practice, as well as reconciling it with Scripture and tradition, cannot be avoided. I believe that I have offered a sufficient, if necessarily partial, response to the questions of our respondents.

In summary, it seems clear to me that all three ought to note and reckon with the larger witness of Scripture and tradition, rather than trying to pin us down on a single biblical verse or Church Father. I have noted that Joslyn-Siemiatkoski could perhaps explain further why he feels that Augustine’s model of marriage is no longer applicable, as well as how he thinks *proles* may be sheared off of *fides* and *sacramentum* in a fully Augustinian account. I have questioned whether MacDougall paid much attention to our argument about the Augustinian tradition, when some of his own comments about the tradition and Augustine affirm what we have said. Moreover, he might pay closer attention to the full context of Ephesians 5, supply some actual content in his argument about eschatology, and reckon with a fuller set of resources for discerning contemporary practice. I have challenged Tanner’s misreading of our argument about the character of suffering in marriage, and I have sketched out the Scriptural and traditional foundations for understanding how the relationship of Christ and the Church is generative, in a manner similar (but not identical) to the generative relationship of a man and a woman. What remains now is to see whether our respondents will continue the dialogue. For my part and that of the other authors in *Fully Alive*, we will continue our work of slowly addressing the various topics we have outlined for ourselves, and we will take into account the issues that our three respondents have raised as well. So far as it lies with us, we cannot lack energy or motivation at this time. Past, present, and future generations deserve our best. We thus pray to the Lord for inspiration, drive, and focus, for ourselves and for those joining us in holy conversation.

⁴⁴ Tanner, “A Rejoinder,” p. 6.