

Submission Regarding the Marriage Canon

The Scriptural teaching about marriage is well summed up in the traditional three purposes of marriage stated in the Marriage service of both the BCP and the BAS: the mutual support and love that each partner gives to the other, the placing of sexual intercourse within God's ordering love, and the procreation and raising of children. Because two of these purposes relate directly to Scripture's teaching about the purpose and nature of sexuality, what Scripture teaches about marriage depends on what it teaches about sexuality. We maintain that there is a consistent teaching in Scripture that sexual intercourse between members of the same sex is contrary to God's ordering love and God's purpose for sexuality. If so, then marriage between members of the same sex would be contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

On the face of it, it would seem that the scriptural case against the acceptance of homosexual practice is a strong one. All of the scripture texts that refer to this practice are uniformly negative. This is what leads Richard Hays, for instance, after examining all the Scripture texts that refer to homosexual practice in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, to conclude that for the church to accept homosexual practice would be unscriptural. Arguments for this acceptance must assert that there are qualifying reasons for not taking these texts to mean what they seem to mean. The texts must be manipulated or disregarded in order to show that what Scripture seems to say on the face of it is not actually the message we are to take from Scripture. There are no convincing arguments that Scripture actually has an clear positive attitude towards homosexual relationships in any of the texts that deal directly with it.

This may not seem to settle the question. We prefer the teaching of science over teachings which might seem to be Implied by Scripture, such as an earth-centred universe. It could be argued that science now knows more about sexuality than people did in Biblical times and we can correct their views without calling the teaching of Scripture as a whole into question. However we would suggest that it is not at all evident that science sheds the same kind of light on sexuality that it does on cosmology. Issues of sexuality have to do with matters of psychology and the understanding of natural law that are able to be addressed much less definitively by modern thought than cosmological issues. Can anyone read the story of Creation without suspecting that in the Hebrew thought represented there, there is a necessary connection in God's creative purpose between sex and procreation? When this is linked to the texts which are negative about homosexual practice, does this not indicate that scriptural teaching is against such practice?

In what sense can this teaching be said to be outdated? Does a practitioner of modern behavioural science know more than St. Paul knew (leaving the inspiration of Scripture aside) about creation and God's purposes for nature? And yet is this scriptural doctrine of creation and the divine purpose for sex taken seriously in the debate about homosexuality in our church? Or have many elements of our church accepted a secular thinking that does not even attempt to come to terms with these issues as the basis of their thinking? It seems that, far from all the arguments being considered, our church has barely begun to consider them. In this we compare unfavourably to the Roman Catholic church, whose

catechism gives a clear and well thought out examination of this question drawing on their understanding of natural law.

Is it not obvious that the same kind of secular assumptions that are being brought to bear on the texts of Scripture that deal with homosexual practice in order to dismiss them would also, if there were the desire to do so, lead to dismissing all the major teachings of Scripture, from the Incarnation to the atonement to the resurrection?

Perhaps this is enough to suggest that the debate has by no means dealt with the issues at hand. What about the consensus that is reflected in the state of the question in the Canadian church? We find very little there to make us think that there is a basis for moving forward on this issue. Consider two of the conclusions to date. "The question of same-sex relations is a matter of doctrine, but not creedal doctrine." What is there of substance in this conclusion? True, it is an issue of doctrine, but what does it mean to say that it is not creedal? Everyone knew that the matter is not addressed in the creeds. Neither are many matters which are essential to Anglican Christianity. Secondly, the matter is not one that should be "communion-dividing." Well, everyone can see that it is communion dividing, from the Primate's Meetings, to Gafcon, to events in the Episcopal church, to the Anglican Network in Canada – perhaps one might *wish* that it were not, but that does not make it so.

What upsets us profoundly in this debate is that if the move to accept homosexual relationships and endorse them as a basis for marriage is unscriptural then it means that the church risks abandoning its own highest authority. We cannot then just say about this question that "we've got to agree to differ", because the relation of Scripture and the church means that such moves call into question the "we." What church is there without the authority of Scripture? That is what we as clergy in the Diocese of Ontario are trying to deal with.

Submitted by the Anglican Communion Alliance, Diocese of Ontario chapter