

Introduction

I am making a submission to this committee hesitatingly. I do not like confrontations in the Church. I do not think in the long run that they are healthy for the wellbeing of the Church. I definitely do not like being part of these confrontations. As I read the motion as stated it sounds to me too much like a challenge, too much like confrontation. This is different from healthy debate and discussion. Nevertheless I make this submission as it appears to be the only way we will have any discussion. I make this submission as an individual. The paper contained within was written by me as a discussion paper for a Synod of the Diocese I was part of at the time. These are my views and not the official position of that diocese. It was meant to get discussion started. It is also not meant as the stand of the Diocese of which I am now Bishop. Although I cannot stop being who I am, I write as a member of the Anglican Church of Canada.

I give the whole paper as presented and although it is broader in scope than the motion and some of the issues contained are specific to the area, it gives principals in church tradition and decision making that I believe to be very important in the issue of the motion.

At the end of this paper I will give some concluding remarks that will state my opinion to the matters immediately concerning the motion.

A discussion paper taken from the Synod journal 2008 of the Diocese of the Arctic
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Biblical Marriage

In the world today we learn that marriage is not all the same. People from different lands and cultures have different customs about marriage. Different religions have different beliefs about marriage. In Canada today the customs and laws regarding marriage are changing very quickly. Here are some of the customs of some people today.

1. Some couples get married very soon after they meet each other. There is no time to get to know each other.
2. Most people have had sexual relationships before they get married. Very few people are virgins when they get married.
3. Many do not bother with a marriage ceremony. They just move in together. We call this common law relationships
4. 3 out of 5 couples who live together separate.
5. Divorce is easy to get.
6. Some people marry 3-5 times in their lifetime
7. Homosexual couples can now get married by the government.

Marriage of today is different than when we were young or different from those of our elders or ancestors.

1. Marriage used to be arranged by the parents, now people choose each other.
2. Normally marriage was for life. Now some people have many partners.
3. In the days of our elders when people move in together without getting married because there was no minister, they got married immediately when the minister came.
4. Some of our ancestors had more than one husband at the same time when there was a shortage of females to marry. Today this is not allowed.

With so many different customs and laws it is important for us as Christians to know what the Bible says about marriage. As Anglicans the bible is very important to us. The Bible provides us with the rules and guidelines that help us to make decisions.

When Anglicans make decisions they look at what has happened in the past. What did the Christians of long ago do? What did Christians believe long ago? We call this "Tradition".

Anglicans also use our minds to think. We call this reason. Today is very so different then 2000 years ago. A Long time ago 3 out of 4 babies born died very quickly. Now because of new medicines and knowledge of how to care for our bodies most babies live. Today we have new guns and weapons that can destroy the world. God expects us to use our minds when we make decisions about how we live in today's world.

Anglicans know that in the past we have made wrong decisions. We have done things we should not have done. We also know that we are sinners. We know that because we are sinners our thoughts our often not good. Sometimes because we are sinners we think that some decisions are good when they are not good.

This is the reason why we have the Bible. The Bible is God's word. It gives us God's law and shows us how to live as Christians. It gives us the rules and guidelines to help us make good decisions. So what does the bible say about Marriage.

1. We will look at how marriage began in the Bible.
2. We will learn why we have marriage
3. We will briefly look at some questions people are asking today about marriage.

How did marriage begin?

Marriage begins with the Story of God creating the World and all things in it. (Creation)

Genesis 1:26-28

Genesis 2:4-7 & 20-25

Mark 10:6-9

Marriage begins with God creating man and woman. It was God who called man and woman to come together. It did not begin with man and women deciding to live together but with God calling them to live together. There is no Christian marriage without God. When a Christian thinks about marriage he or she needs to pray and ask God our Father to lead them to the right person. This decision should not be taken lightly. That is why the Anglican Church requires that all who are going to marry take proper preparation training. In our Diocese we ask you to give your minister at least 2 month notice (more if the minister requires it) of people getting married. This allows time for the couple to take preparation classes.

These verses tell us that marriage is between a man and a woman. Genesis 1:27 says "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them".

Man and woman together in marriage are meant to reflect or mirror the image of God. Not man alone, not woman alone but man and woman together living as husband and wife serving God our Father is to be like a picture of what God is like. How Christian husbands and wives love each other, how they protect and provide for each other, and how they cooperate and work together should teach us about what God is like.

When God planned man and women he made them different. He created them so that they need each other. We learn this is so when we think about the birth of a child. The woman can give birth to a child. She was made by God that way. The man cannot bear a child. No matter how much he wants to or how hard he tries he cannot have a child. God did not give him that ability. But the woman cannot have a child without the man. He must give his sperm or seed to the woman for God to create a child inside the women. The new born child comes from both the man and the woman. They are both needed. This was the plan of God.

The bible says they become one flesh. The two in their bodies and in their minds make one unit that will reflect what God is like. Two women together or two men together cannot do this as God planned. Each sex in themselves is not enough, they need each other to be all that God has planned for them in marriage.

Mark 10:6-9 Jesus tells us here that marriage was part of the plan of creation. In becoming one flesh, we learn that their commitments, made by each other to each other, no one should break or separate. We learn that marriage should be lifelong. This was God's intention for people getting married. They are to stay married until death separates them. This brings up the whole question of Divorce which I will address later in this essay.

As we listen to the words of Jesus, we learn that marriage is two becoming one flesh. It means each one making commitments to each other. This commitment is not meant to be separated or broken. Jesus in the gospel of John chapter 2 by attending a wedding gives his approval of such a rite. Marriage to Jesus is more than just 2 people moving in with each other. It was an agreement made by a man and woman with the approval of the religious community and the Government of the day. An agreement or contract was written up that could be used to show that each of the couple had certain rights by law. This agreement was not meant to be broken and so it needed the approval of the religious community in order to break the contract, that is get a divorce. This makes us ask questions about Common Law Marriage. This too we will look at later.

When God created man and woman, he made them to be different. To be different does not mean that one is more important or better than the other. It only means that man and women have different functions in marriage. God created Eve from the rib of Adam. They are made out of the same material. Eve was not made from the feet of Adam so Adam could boss it over her. Eve was not made from the head of Adam so she could boss it over him. Eve was made from the side of Adam to be his help mate. Eve was made to walk beside him as of equal value; one is not more important than the other. Working together they are to do the will of God. They become one flesh. Not two different persons but one flesh or person, They are equal, relying on each other; helping each other; and loving each other, being faithful solely to each other. This is why the church in the past and still does say marriage is between one man and one woman.

Why do we have marriage? What is its purpose?

There are those who say that the people of the world have changed so much that marriage has no value any more- that there are better ways to come together. In order to reply to these words we need to know why God gave us marriage to begin with.

Genesis 1:27-30, Chapter 9:7

Ephesians 5:31-33

From the creation story we learn that man and woman were brought together to have Children and to give comfort and companionship to each other. And this is done in a relationship where there is love and respect for each other.

There are more than these reasons for marriage. People get married to be safe and have protection. They get married so they will have shelter and food.

Nevertheless I want to suggest that because Jesus refers to these passages as the origins of marriage then the reasons they give for marriage are very important.

Living together in community is how the people of the world come together.

1. First we have Families - made of parents and children
2. Then we have extended Families Parents and Children and other relatives (uncles Aunts, Grandparents and their families:
3. Many extended families make a town or communities,

4. Several cities make a province or a country.

In-order for this to happen it is God's plan that husband and wife live in a loving caring relationship and have children so that the community can form and be sustained.

Our marriage service in the BCP (pg. 564) reflects the reason for marriage is to have children that will become our future communities. Marriage also in the Book of Common Prayer, is for companionship help and protection. The family unit forms the basis of society. The Prayer Book states:

Matrimony was ordained for the hallowing (or making holy) of the union between man and woman; for the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord; and for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, in both prosperity and adversity.

The Bible says very little about the marriage service. Because of this there are many Christian services around the world and many reflect the different cultures of the people who are there. In general they have the following features:

1. They are between one man and one woman
2. There are vows of faithfulness exchanged.
3. There are witnesses to those vows.
4. Marriage is for life.
5. Give at least 2 purposes of marriage - having children and companionship.
6. The government recognized the relationship as marriage.

For us in the Diocese of the Arctic we have 2 questions about marriage that we still ask regularly. The first Question: is Divorce allowed in marriage? Secondly: Are Common Law Relationships marriage? I would like us to look at what the Scriptures says about these two issues and then I would like us to break up into small groups and discuss among yourselves.

DIVORCE

Is divorce allowed in marriage? For many years divorce was not recognized by the Church. If you did get divorced by the government you could not get married in the church again. To many today it seems like it is easy to get a divorce. Many people are married and divorced several times in a lifetime. I remember the shock of some when they learned that their minister was divorced.

To begin with, both scripture and the teaching of the Anglican Church, say that marriage was designed or meant to be for life. When a man and a women come together in marriage it is to be for the rest of their lives. When there is trouble in a marriage the couple is told to work together to mend the relationship. I believe that when two people decide to love each other then there is always a way to bring healing into a marriage. It is when one person decides not to love the other that healing or reconciliation is prevented. Remember love is not a feeling but the giving of ourselves to another. Love puts the other person first. It is when a person decides not to love that healing or reconciliation cannot take place.

In saying this we recognize that we are all sinners and that none of us can love as we should. It also needs to be recognized that even if one person makes the decision to love the other may not. This is the reasoning for the instructions concerning marriage in I Corinthians 7.

When all attempts of healing and reconciliation has been tried what does the Bible say about divorce?

Deut. 24:2

1 Cor. 7:10-11

1Cor. 7:12-15

Mat 5:31-32

There are other passages but they seem to be variations of the ones stated. What can we learn from them?

Firstly we learn the in the Old Testament (remember that was Jesus' Bible) people were allowed to remarry if they got a divorce. Divorce was the cutting of all marital commitments between the couple making them free to marry again. Jesus being a Jew would have acknowledged this. The issue for Jesus was not "Is divorce allowed?", but the issue was "What are the conditions allowing divorce?"

The passage in Mathew 5 would appear to be clear enough-that in the case of sexual unfaithfulness divorce was allowed. The passage in 1 Cor. 7 is not so easy to interpret. Is the separation mentioned divorce? Certainly this does not seem to be the case in verses 10 and 11. Paul writes that if a spouse leaves the other then they should remain unmarried or be reconciled to the other spouse. This would imply that there is still some form of marriage ties between them. This may be where there was marriage breakdown of some sort but not where divorce was desired by the wife. We do not know any more than this. In verses 12-15 we are dealing with a couple where the spouse was not a believer. It would imply that if the unbelieving spouse chooses to leave then divorce is allowed.

So there do seem to be situations where divorce is allowed. What about a case where the wife is continually being beaten. Is she expected to stay in the marriage relationship and continue to be beaten? I do not think that it is the will of God that she stay if the husband will not repent. I know of a case where this very thing has been happening for many years. Both spouses would claim to be Christian. Is this right?

What about the case where a Christian spouse leaves the other one and gets a divorce. Scripture may not allow it but it does happen. Does the other spouse have to remain unmarried? Sometimes the Christian spouse that leaves gets married again. The Bible does not mention these or other situations. I think we need to be careful about making judgment statements about people. We must be careful that we understand the Bible we read. We must be careful about saying all problems are the same and have the same solution. The Bible had different solutions for different situations. As problems arise that are not mentioned in the Bible, we need to look for guidance from God's Word that will help the church make decisions that will honour God's Word and God's People.

Common Law Relationships

The other big concern we have in our diocese seems to be regarding common law relationships. How do we in the diocese treat them?

To date the church does not recognize common law relationships as marriage. This diocese asks that those living in common law relationships be legally married by the government before we will bless the marriage. In the same way this diocese does not license or ordain people living in a common law relationship, to the ministry because they do not recognize common law relationships as marriage. In saying this I have 2 children living in common-law relationships. What is their status in the church? Because they are believers I would not refuse them Holy Communion, nor would I refuse to baptize their children if they had any.

The Bible does not mention common-law relationships that I am aware of. It only says that sex outside of a marriage is considered fornication. The question we need to answer is: Do Common-law relationships fulfill the requirements to be called marriage according to God's word? Do they fulfill the following?

1. Are between one man and one woman?
2. Are vows of faithfulness exchanged?
3. Are there witnesses to those vows?
4. Is it for life?
5. Does the relationship have "having children" and "companionship" as reasons for the relationship?

6. Is it recognized as marriage by the government?

If a common law relationship is not marriage and I do not believe it is, how do we treat members of the Church who have decided to live in a common law relationship? Because how we treat these members of the Church will help us to decide how we treat other members of the Church such as those living in same sex relationships.

Currently we do not license or ordain members of the church who are living common law. Should this continue?

If Time Questions for Discussion

Should the Diocese set policies for how we treat divorced people and common law relationships?

What guidelines would you suggest about those divorced?

What guidelines would you suggest about those living in common law relationships? Please write your answers down to be handed in.

Conclusion

The views of the Discussion Paper are my views. I believe that the Doctrine of Marriage touches on other central doctrines concerning the Nature of God, the Authority of Scripture, and the teaching of Creation. Because of this I believe we must be very careful about making changes that effect these doctrines.

Therefore I have the following objections to the motion and could not vote in favour of it as it is written.

1. The motion seems to assume that the past discussions held in the Anglican Church of Canada, regarding Same Sex Blessings is the same as Same Sex Marriage. This is not I believe the case. As a member of the House of Bishops I have brought up this very question and have been told by Past Primates and Bishops, promoting Same Sex Blessings, that this is not Marriage. Some may have supported Blessings under the assurance that it was not Marriage. To my knowledge the Anglican Church of Canada or groups within has only produced 2 papers on Same Sex Marriage and both have advised against it. From my experience of 14 years in the House of Bishops, we have talked mainly of Same sex Blessings and not Marriage. It has always been stated as two different subjects. We desperately need an honest and frank discussion on marriage.
2. For the 2000 year history of the Church and for the vast majority (if not all) of other religions, marriage has always been between man and woman. Sometimes there is more than one woman or more than one man involved, but always at least one man and one woman. I believe we walk on shaky ground when we make such a radical redefinition of Marriage that this motion suggests, especially when the vast majority of the Christian denominations and other religions are not walking with us.
3. I believe sexual behavior is a moral issue. This motion says a sexual behavior that the Church could not receive as morally acceptable since its beginnings, is now holy in the sight of God.
4. I suggest that we are in too much of a hurry. For 2000 years the church has had a stable definition of what marriage is. We have only been discussing this change, (actually most of our discussion has been about Blessings and not Marriage) for little more than 20 years and then only with ourselves. I would not want to make such radical changes without proper Discussion at least with the whole Anglican Communion.
5. Finally I could not accept this motion as written because I fear for the disunity that it may cause, not only in the Anglican Church of Canada, but also with the worldwide Anglican Communion and the rest of the Christian World.

I want to end by saying that as a Bishop of this Church I hold a great love for all the people that make up the Church. I am committed to serve them in Christ's name and in His love. I pray that we will be able to work together as Christ's family proclaiming His love to the world around us.

Respectfully submitted

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