

This submission addresses the practical problem created by the conflict between changes going on to do with marriage and those that oppose them, nothing weightily theoretical. One of those changes is the shift in emphasis from marriage (a long-term relationship distinct from a wedding) to wedding, for which the term 'marriage' confusingly is often used. We do this by some comments on your questions and follow up with the proposal that the Church should stick to marriage and leave weddings to those married and the state.

The questions that you pose on your web site are bound to influence the expression and even the thinking of many of its readers. We think that this is a pity, for the questions are not as well posed as they could be. For example, you repeatedly use the term 'theological significance' as though everyone knows what you mean by it. We do not see a uniform meaning.

More importantly for us, the questions make us uneasy about an important aspect that you seem to have ignored. We in Canada are accused by our third-world critics of caving in to secular forces in our acknowledgement of the fact of homosexuality, and the accusation is not unknown within the Anglican Church of Canada. We do not think that anything that the Church has done so far deserves that accusation and one of us has publicly advocated the blessing of married homosexual couples. Please see 'Blessings and the Anglican Church of Canada'

<<http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~thomas/Research/blessings.pdf>>, six pages posted April 2009.

Nevertheless we do think that we should be sensitive to that accusation and prevent that sort of misinterpretation of what we say and do. Much of our trouble in the years while this issue has been before us has been --- in our opinion --- because of our institutional acquiescence in society's shift in focus from the institution and long-term existence of marriage to weddings. Weddings are the almost entirely secular ceremony where the photographer almost officiates before the picture-taking hour where the photographer actually does officiate. This nonsense has gone so far that what is thought to require preparation is the wedding rather than the marriage despite Schedule E of the Marriage Canon, 'Marriage Preparation'. Your lack of careful distinction between fleeting weddings and the enduring marriages plays into this error in a context where the distinction ought to have been made and given whatever emphasis you think it merits. Your report should not make this mistake.

We'll run through the questions briefly, since only to the last have we a serious reply.

1. How do you interpret what scripture says about marriage?

We do not interpret scripture on marriage and wish only to point out that there is no consensus on how it should be interpreted. This will not have changed by 2016. Even in the long run, consensus is unlikely. Scripture seems not much interested in weddings.

2. How do you understand the theological significance of gender difference in marriage?

We are not sure that there is any theological significance to what sorts of persons marry. All sorts do. This seems an obvious fact, but it is widely unacceptable.

3. Is there a distinction between civil marriage and Christian marriage?

If one regards civil marriage as a legal agreement and Christian marriage as a sacrament, then there is a big gap between them. But more to the point, we are uncomfortable with this distinction as posed. What does it mean? Is a marriage between Christians who were married, perhaps some years ago, in a civil ceremony a civil marriage or a Christian marriage? Your question seems to be drifting toward the

confusion of weddings and marriages; a more pointed question would be about the difference between a civil wedding followed by a nuptial blessing and a Christian wedding. But that is more or less your question 5. On marriages rather than weddings, the difference is whether one or both of the partners are Christians and see the marriage in Christian terms, facts that can change in time. The wedding is not relevant.

4. The marriage canon describes 'the purposes of marriage' as mutual fellowship, support, and comfort; the procreation (if it may be) and nurture of children; and the creation of a relationship in which sexuality may serve personal fulfilment in a community of faithful love. What is the theological significance of:

companionship in marriage?

bearing and raising children?

the relationship between marriage and sexuality?

Marriage is a standard laboratory for our experiments in love, which is both easier and harder for companions. But we are not comfortable with discussing theological significance.

5. What is the difference between marriage and the blessing of a relationship?

This question would be clearer if it compared a wedding and the blessing of a relationship, which may (and in the Anglican Church of Canada we believe must) follow a civil wedding. But the question is still unsatisfactory. The research on blessings, recounted in the essay referred to above, indicates that the Church does not bless relationships any more than incumbencies or episcopacies or primacies. This is not because we do not pray for all of them but because we bless participants and not abstractions. This has been borne out in the rites adopted for blessings since General Synod allowed dioceses to do that. Persons are blessed --- as they should be. We have no excuse for not blessing anyone that wants a blessing. Marrying them is an altogether different matter.

6. How do you understand the sacramentality of marriage?

If one is to make sense of the sacramentality of marriage, however relevant that may be or not be to this inquiry, one has to take the focus off weddings and concentrate on the fact that a marriage, if it is real, lasts some time. Its starting point, while unlikely to be forgotten by the participants, is of little importance by comparison. What matters is the day-by-day living in the marriage. That is the inward and spiritual grace's outward and visible sign --- not doing those things that we ought not to do and doing those things that we ought to do. Marriage, like baptism, is a sacrament that can be conducted by laypersons and is if the couple happen to be lay. We frankly doubt the sacramentality of weddings. We wish the couple well and bless them, but we do little about the marriage beyond wishing and blessing (i.e., praying for God's blessing).

The little more that we want to say in our submission begins by observing, beyond our reply to your sixth question, that the sacramentality of weddings --- as distinct from marriage --- was, according to the eminent Church historian Diarmaid MacCulloch in a lecture one of us attended in Oxford last winter, an invention of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Previous to that marriage in the West had been a natural matter arranged by parties to it (not just the partners of course). Our own view, which is of little importance but ought to be stated, is that we have already returned to this situation, and the Church should recognize this fact. A dwindling minority of couples now have a wedding before living together; a wedding, as a public acknowledgement of a private arrangement, is not remotely sacramental except perhaps in recognizing that the marriage sacrament is already in full swing. Better

to bless these couples when they have been civilly married than try to invent a whole new theology of marriage as defined by Parliament. (We are not suggesting that work isn't needed on the theology of marriage, only that it takes a while to get such things accepted widely.) Our submission, however, is more modest. We just want to point out forcefully that if you disagree with our position you have a lot of work to do to justify any conclusion but getting out of the wedding business --- not to mention how to do weddings without being unnecessarily divisive of both the Anglican Church of Canada and the Anglican Communion. We emphasize the gratuitousness of such action. The Anglican Church of Canada doesn't need to marry anybody; it would be better off marrying nobody than tearing itself apart in deciding whom to marry when the available answers are unsatisfactory. We doubt that the Church will be allowed to get out of the business altogether, and freestanding blessings will become much more popular than they are now. The evenhandedness of this as between heterosexual and homosexual couples is what is desirable and would be accomplished.

We know that some clergy adopt more or less this point of view because we attended a blessing in July following a civil wedding that day on account of the priest's refusal to do for a heterosexual couple what she could not do for a homosexual couple.

Respectfully submitted on August 21, 2014, our 49th wedding anniversary,
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