

Submission to the Marriage Commission
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The Sexual Revolution Is Not Over Yet . . .

This is an opportunity to express my heartfelt convictions on the subject of marriage and I am grateful to the Commission members for their careful listening.

In my submission I will address some of the key principles undergirding the acceptance of same sex marriage with a view to evaluating them as suitable authoritative sources for the Resolution before us. A wide perspective is necessary in making such weighty considerations and many have been attentive to the footprints of the past—the “democracy of the dead” as Chesterton put it—in coming to their conclusions. I want to stretch that perspective to include *the future*.

Kathleen Wynne, the Ontario Premier, invited people to visit our province where we don't discriminate against those whom you can love. A powerful statement indeed! There are no arguments against love. God offers to each of us unconditionally his all-embracing love, not some sentimental, saccharine emotion, but one demonstrated in the action of the Cross and the life of Jesus. With faith and with courage we can receive this unsurpassed love and it literally transforms our whole being. With God's acceptance we can do anything; we have truly a new life.

Love, then, is the foremost argument offered to support a change to the marriage canon to allow those in same sex relationships to marry. Why should two people who love each other be denied the dignity and societal approval that marriage offers? God whose very essence is love could surely not withhold his approval of such human love.

The argument for *inclusivity* is a compelling one. So many classes of people formerly excluded—the racially different, women—have succeeded through hard-won battles in gaining social acceptance. No rational case can be made to exclude the LGBTQI community from the same affirmation. Formal human rights protection has sealed this agreement.

Equality is an obvious player to bring onto the field in considering the new marriage arrangements. Anglicans are known for their fairness. We wear it as a badge of honour. If marriage is our society's marker to legitimate and protect opposite sex couples with various social, health and financial benefits, surely same sex couples deserve the same advantages.

Since this is a matter of church doctrine, what about arguments from *Scripture*? It is often said that “the Spirit is doing a new thing” in blessing same sex unions and who

would want to discourage such a fresh move of God? It is clear that not all of the Old Testament law continues to be operative in the New Testament. Jesus himself made such distinctions in pointing to the heart as a great determinant. And was Paul actually referring to sexual orientation in his negative attitude to homosexual behaviour, for these earlier understandings lacked even the basic vocabulary to describe such loving relationships?

This identification of *love, inclusivity, equality, and Scripture* do not exhaust the case for same sex marriage but they are I believe among the most frequently appealed to, especially among that Protestant wing of the ecumenical family that wishes to move in this direction.

We need a keen ear to be attuned to the directions our culture is taking. The “great cloud of witnesses” points to an interesting mixture of church and society working together to usher in Christ’s Kingdom on earth as it relates to freedom for racial minorities and women.¹

By contrast, the story of gay liberation has not been characteristically a Christian one with much of the impetus coming from social activists, and the Church, particularly the Anglican Church (with some few exceptions), has been slower to embrace same sex unions with the same determination as, for example, the United Church of Canada in its 1988 ruling.² Few would dispute that the journey has been a bumpy one.

That being said, we are on the cusp of inaugurating a doctrinal departure that involves changing an ecclesiastical canon on marriage to include same sex couples in the same manner as opposite sex couples. We are all aware that this is a significant development and examining our intentions prior to this enactment is part of the process leading up to it. I think it fair to say that the intention of the original framers of this canon was that Canon XXI be a permanent law for our sojourn on this earth recognizing that in the heavenly realm “they neither marry nor are given in marriage.” Some questions are relevant at this juncture.

1. Is it the intention of the Commission to close the marriage canon after including same sex couples under its revised rubric?

¹ For example, the Church of England’s evangelical Member of Parliament, William Wilberforce, at the turn of the 19th century and the American black Baptist minister, Martin Luther King, in the 1960s provided critical leadership in the black liberation narrative. A similar story of Christian initiative from such historical figures as Hildegard de Bingen, Catherine Booth, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the more radical feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether, demonstrates the role of Christian involvement in women’s journey to equality.

² It is not my intention to recount the history of same sex unions and the ACC in this limited space. See the ACC website <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/focus/hs/ssbh/> for a fuller account.

2. Or does the very act of changing the canon in response to social/ political demands for equality put synods in the position of being thereafter *subject to equality demands as in themselves higher principles* than those that initiated the original canon? ³

3. Or is this step just the first along the way to other perhaps unanticipated new relationships that might emerge in the years ahead? Intention is important to establish.

Let us now, as best we can, *peer into the future* with a view to considering any possible or logical developments that might occur in our society, anticipating their potential to prompt further reconsiderations of Canon XXI, particularly in light of the guiding principles of love, inclusivity, equality, and relevant Scripture.

To begin I will draw attention to, not so much future possibilities, but current progressive practices that seem to have slipped under the radar of same sex marriage advocates.

The first three points relate to language. In addressing the inclusion of same sex couples within the marriage canon under the singular designation of marriage, the unexpressed assumption is that now there will be two varieties of unions involved. But in fact, there are three: male/female couples, male/male couples, and female/female couples. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot fairly be imposed on all three pairings for there are significant differences in life variables. The biggest difference is in the number of children produced in the male/female category and this implies very specific demands both during marriage and in marriage breakups. Each of the three has different rates of divorce, length of marriages, age of marriage, age separation of couples, health prognoses, openness of their marriages.⁴

³ An excerpt from the original Marriage Canon XXI: The Church affirms in like manner the goodness of the union of man and woman in marriage, this being of God's creation.¹ Marriage also is exalted as a sign² of the redeeming purpose of God to unite all things in Christ,³ the purpose made known in the reunion of divided humanity in the Church. ⁴

1. Cf. Gen. 1:27-31

2. Eph. 5:31f.

3. Eph. 1:9f.

4. Eph. 2:11-16

⁴ See Noack, Turid, Ane Seierstad, and Kenneth Aarskaug Wiik of the Research Department, Statistics Norway. "Divorce Risk in Norwegian Same-sex Marriages 1993 to 2010," presented at the Population Association of America Annual Meeting in San Francisco (May 3-5, 2012): pp. 1-26. Web. 31 January 2013. Available: <http://paa2012.princeton.edu/papers/120309>. Also: Allen, Douglas W. "No-fault divorce in Canada: Its cause and effect" *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*

The second point concerns the terminology of inclusion. We have been encouraged in Anglican circles to use the terms LGBT to refer to our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender brothers and sisters. It stems from a desire to be inclusive and not to privilege simply gays and lesbians. Nothing to my knowledge has been said about the exclusion of bisexuals and transgendered people from the marriage event, but they are nonetheless excluded. Polyamory⁵ is a natural location for bisexuals to establish more permanent groupings and there is considerable activism to have these relationships of usually a threesome acknowledged. Currently the mission statement of their Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness supports “the right of polyamorous people to have their unions blessed by a minister.” How do these threesomes figure in our principles of inclusivity?

Transgendered persons, on the other hand, don’t necessarily stay within this designation depending on their circumstances as they transition between genders, sometimes preferring such labels as queer, intersex, or just “questioning.” The acronym, QUILTBAG, has gained some attention as it draws under one label these varieties of sexualities: Queer/Questioning, Undecided, Intersex, Lesbian, Trans, Bisexual, Asexual, Gay. What is needed to accommodate this group in a relationship that can be blessed? Where do they stand vis-à-vis our marriage canon?

The third language issue concerns the word, “gender.” Most of us have been pretty thoroughly conditioned to use “gender” in the place of “sex” to affirm the separation of the biological notion of sex from the socially-constructed stereotypical behaviours our culture associates with feminine or masculine genders. This seems a fair understanding and feminism has built its theories in large measure on this principle. In order to acknowledge the flexibility and freedom gender offers, some countries refer not to same sex marriage but to gender neutral marriage. In an attempt to avoid all distinctions of a binding nature between biological sex and social symbolic identifiers of gender difference, Norway adopted gender neutral marriage in 2008. This allows for whatever new configurations of gender might be required in a more fluid marriage of the future, arrangements that are currently outside our imaginative possibilities. To stave off subsequent adjustments to the marriage canon, would it not be wise to nuance the “same sex” designation which is quickly becoming obsolete in the interests of a *gender neutral marriage*?

Once one has granted the separation of sex and gender it is not so easy to stop the train for it moves inexorably in certain directions. *Be sure of one thing: The Sexual Revolution Is Not Over!* In fact whether the discipline be psychology, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, visual art, film, musicology, feminism, queer theory,

Vol. 37. (1998): 129-149. Web. 16 October 2012. Available:
<http://www.sfu.ca/~allen/nofaultCan.pdf>.

⁵ Polyamory suggests involvement in multiple romantically connected relationships—always more than a couple.

gender studies, sexuality studies, interdisciplinary studies—or a plethora of other departments—gender is likely to be the dominant area of study in North American University Arts Programs.

The current reigning notion of gender is its performative role in acting out gender, now thoroughly severed from biological sexuality.⁶ One cannot assume that sex and gender are aligned except through the repetition of words, gestures, desires, and acts played out on the body. Such behaviours challenge the controlling cultural tendencies to claim natural or sexual identities.

You might ask, whatever happened to the idea of the innate and immutable nature of gay and lesbian sexuality, strong pillars in the sexual activists' plank? This certainly marked the initial forays of 1980s gay advocacy, but in the next decade it gave way to gender transgression. The truth is sexes and genders in the LGBTQI community did not line up in conventional way. Thus people's genders changed over time: gays and lesbians had sex with each other, or had straight sex, or sex with trans people, or simply moved along the gender spectrum. The point is that gender, now divorced from sex, is an unstable, fluid phenomenon in an environment where sexual prohibitions have all but disappeared.

Whatever the specifics of developing sexualities, they move unerringly in the direction of expansion. In keeping with much of what they are taught in sex education classes in public school, young people are so redefining and renegotiating their sexuality that to claim the gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity is almost meaningless.

As caring Anglicans we are faced with the decision to marry same sex couples in order that the principles of love, inclusivity, equality, and a certain Scriptural interpretation might be honoured in guiding us. How are these same principles to direct us in the future—or is it the present if we were more in tune with our culture—in the face of ever-changing sexual innovations?

The logic of the arguments to include same sex couples demands love/acceptance, inclusion, equality, and Scriptural accommodation of new varieties of sexualities. It would seem obvious that the classifications of sexual nuance are so variable that some kind of continuum or spectrum is the more appropriate imagery to describe the current state. Is the plan to adapt our canons incrementally to the careening culture? Or do we have some unshakable alternatives?

Maybe we are on the wrong train and need to get off. The latest Canadian Census of 2011 points to a significant drop in traditional marriages and stands at 67% of all families. Married same sex couples, after six years since the passage of same sex

⁶ See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Or you might enjoy her lectures on YouTube. Butler is an academic star of the first rank.

legislation, comprise 0.19% of all families. These 0.19% are important no matter what their numbers, but it might be worthwhile to heighten our ministry focus also on the 16.27% that are lone parents.

The voice of Jesus intrudes in my musings. When asked a question about divorce, Jesus answered, 'Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning "made them male and female", ⁵and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate' (Matthew 19.4-6 NRSV).

We have been asleep while the culture has been appropriating modified Christian principles to support sexual innovations through public education, a sex-saturated media, advertising, malls, and every possible means at its disposal. We need to understand that God's love is unlimited in its embrace of each person but when it transforms us it shapes us into the cruciform image of Jesus where we learn true freedom in self-emptying and service.

Marriage is unlike other institutions that are amenable to majority votes in parliaments or synods. It is rather a delicate ecosystem, one that we need to attend to with much love and tenacity, for it is the spawning ground of all humanity. It pre-exists the state and is governed by a higher law that is anchored in the divine, giving it a transcendent and sacramental quality. Male and female united in marriage is a song, begun in Genesis, that resounds throughout the Scriptures, and culminates in the grand chorus of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Our responsibility as Anglicans is to teach the world to sing this song.