

Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon

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You have stated that all submissions will be reviewed prior to being posted on the website. I request respectfully that if you choose to edit/omit my submission you will acknowledge this to me or on the website.

While I believe the Church must hold firm on marriage, I want to see those folks impacted by this restriction to find a path where they develop their own unique institution for living in relationship. God is available to help in this task. They need to be part of Christ's Church while at the same time being faithful to God's plan. Remembering that in the Kingdom to come marriage of any sort will be passé.

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"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit...."
(Hebrews 4:12)

I have learned over a period of time as I have read and studied my Bible just how true this statement rings so many centuries later, Some refer to our holy book as the Living Bible and at times I have felt the sharpness of that sword. My response to the Commission on the Marriage Canon is prompted by such an experience.

I am not a "cradle" Anglican but was for more than twenty years an active member of the United Church of Canada. As I saw my church become ever more "progressive" and all but abandon much of the teachings of the Bible, I knew that I could not continue on this path.

Through an Alpha program in 1998 I joined St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church (Fredericton, N.B.) and came to embrace all that it offered. We are a small Christ-centered and Bible-based faith community using modern forms of worship alongside the traditions and practices as laid out in the BCP. (Book of Common Prayer). I have been richly blessed by this fellowship of believers.

With all the many challenges I experience at this point in my life, I am faced once again with proposed changes which threaten my core beliefs - especially in regard to Canon XXI, Marriage in the Church.

I have read many of the submissions posted on the website and can readily see how one can be pulled emotionally and intellectually in confusing and even opposite directions by the compelling arguments found there. Nevertheless, I am left with what some will call my "simplistic", "conservative", "orthodox", "traditional", yet deeply held convictions on the matter.

I am a committed Christian, a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ. Everything that Jesus said and did as recorded in the Bible directs my faith journey.

He is my role model and my goal as a Christian is to learn to become more like him. His Holy Spirit lives within me as my guide and my strength in this daunting task.

St. Paul has given a good description of the qualities to which we aspire or what is known as the "Fruit of the Spirit"(Galations 5:22) :

"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control". As I wrestle with this issue that has been labelled "Same Sex Marriage" all of these are called into play.

For me this label is inadequate, even misleading, for I sense that what it represents is something much deeper and more fundamental to my belief system and more importantly to Christ's Church here on earth, which includes the Anglican Church of Canada.

Since its inception, the Anglican Church has claimed to be under the authority of its scriptures. The Book of Common Prayer, probably more familiar to many Anglicans than the Bible as a whole, has through several revisions adhered to the principles of the original which claim to take their authority from the three sources of: scripture, tradition and reason.

In the "Supplementary Instruction of the Church Catechism", it says "It (the Bible) tells how God has made himself known to man and how we may come to know him and find salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Church."

In the Articles of Religion (vi): "Holy Scriptures containeth all things necessary to salvation....so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."

History has shown us that from the earliest times the social institution of marriage has been part of man's legal and religious systems. While it is the foundation for stability and family life in any civilized society, for Christians it is the very essence of God's plan for his Kingdom - a union as that between Christ and his Church.

From beginning to end the Bible is consistent about God's intention. In Genesis 1:27 we find that "God created man in his own image..... male and female he created them."

In the New Testament Jesus clearly repeats this (eg, Mark 10:6) "At the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother to be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh."

Imagery in the Book of Revelation describes the new Jerusalem as coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." as just one example.

Even the religious term "Holy Matrimony", with its roots in the Latin "mater" or "mother" implies a union between a man and a woman and has been included as one of seven sacraments in the traditional teaching and practice of the Anglican Church.

Today we are living in a period where an ever-expanding variety of human relationships are demanding "equality", "rights", "inclusion" etc. In Canada the legal system has responded and civil marriage is readily available to same sex couples.

However, pressure from outside the church - from atheists, agnostics, various social movements, activists of numerous causes, - has created great division; while from within, personal experiences where family and friends are living a homosexual lifestyle brings pressure upon those who desire to accept and protect their loved ones.

While these pressures have inevitably resulted in a crisis in the Anglican Church where it is now proposed to amend Canon XXI to permit the institution of marriage to include same-sex relationships, elements of this have happened at earlier times in the history of Christianity.

In his book "Simply Christian", Bishop N.T. Wright has written:

"Throughout the early centuries of Christianity, when every kind of sexual behavior ever known to the human race was widely practised throughout the ancient Greek and Roman society, the Christians, like the Jews, insisted that sexual activity was to be restricted to the marriage of a man and a woman. The rest of the world, then as now, thought they were mad. The difference, alas, is that today half the church seems to think so too."

Some have decided that society has simply "moved forward" - the term "progressive" is often used. But I cannot place such positive changes as we have seen in behaviors related to eg. smoking, drunk driving, spousal abuse, inclusive education or even ordination of women, in the same category as marriage.

Marriage is not just a behavior, a contract, a ceremony, a custom or even a tradition. It is a basic societal institution and when it falls under the aegis of the Christian church it becomes spiritual in nature and under the full authority of God and his Word. "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be" seems befitting here as well.

The movement which began with the frame "Same Sex Marriage" has expanded to encompass the LGBTTIQI Community, a range of human behavior and relationships I admit I struggle to understand.

I heard one night this summer on CBC radio of an initiative in a European country which aims to legalize incestual sex. Several times I have heard of a Man-Boy sex agenda at work here in Canada.

At the very moment of writing (Sept. 2014) a group of influential lawyers in New Brunswick have voted to deny accreditation to a Christian law school in British Columbia which adheres to Biblical teaching on sexual relations and marriage. Those who proudly claim to champion all forms of discrimination do not accept their own discrimination against Christians. Equality rights are clearly impacting religious freedoms. Where does this end? How do we in the Church prepare for an amoral future?

In all the machinations of those members of the clergy and laity, the Council of the General Synod, the Commission of the Marriage Council, no doubt with the best of intention, who are driving this motion to amend Canon XXI, I am reminded of the situation that our Lord addressed with the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, along with the Sanhedrin (Matthew 23) .

In all their accumulated wisdom and learning, they had made a mockery of their faith by abandoning its basic tenets as revealed by God and by claiming an authority that was not their's to claim.

And so I ask myself - If this amendment is passed, will I, once again, have to leave my church?

Perhaps a truer question would be - Is my church leaving me?

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