

# A Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon

by The Reverend Canon Gene Packwood

---

## Preamble

Throughout history the church has struggled with how to reconcile the wisdom and cultural mores of the age with what Scripture teaches. The long (and growing) list of martyrs in our Church Calendar Memorials and Commemorations attests to that. Today is no exception.

Contemporary attitudes towards sexuality and marriage have changed and are less congruent with traditional interpretation of Scriptural standards. The attempt to change the marriage canon is well-meaning effort to develop more inclusive, culturally friendly doctrine in response to these changes. Unfortunately, most often the effort seems to be based on either arguing that the Bible really doesn't say what we thought it did or claiming that this is what we think it ought to say.

The kindness, steadfast love and severity of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, however, has been revealed in ways which are often mysterious and utterly demanding. We don't always get to do what we want, what feels right or makes sense to us. Sexuality and marriage are among those mysterious,<sup>1</sup> utterly demanding scriptural teachings.

Up to now most dialogue around same sex blessing, and now marriage, has been based on experience and emotion, personal preference, present day culture and what seems to be right through post-modern eyes (Jud 17.6; Ez 11.2; Col 2.8). Those in favour of change argue that Biblical teaching on the matter is no longer relevant and that two thousand years of consistent Church teaching and tradition has been mistaken. So far there has been no real Biblical and theological encounter between those who are best qualified to represent the various points of view in the debate; certainly nothing substantive and thorough enough to produce the Biblical and theological rationale necessary to warrant the momentous act of contravening and setting aside such a deeply rooted foundation of Christian Scripture, reason and tradition regarding marriage and sexuality.

My answers to your questions follow:

---

<sup>1</sup> Eph 5:32

---

How do you interpret what scripture says about marriage?

I interpret what Scripture says about marriage based on a plain reading of what I find written there. I am convinced that divine inspiration and many hundreds of years of good and faithful translation and scholarship have resulted in a text which is trustworthy and coherent. Marriage is clearly and consistently presented therein as a unique covenant relationship between a man and a woman instituted by God as part of God's good creation<sup>2</sup> and the history of salvation leading to the Incarnation. Jesus himself endorsed marriage in this form<sup>3</sup> as did the Apostle Paul.<sup>4</sup>

---

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

I understand the theological significance of gender difference in marriage to be absolutely essential in the Christian context. Gender difference delineates marriage. Unless there is gender difference, there can be no marriage. Without gender difference the relationship has to be something other than marriage. Without gender difference there can be no coherent Biblical Christian theology of marriage.

The story of God's dealings with, and purpose for, humanity told in Scripture is a masterpiece of intricate theological design. If that design could somehow be rendered into a jigsaw puzzle an important piece of that puzzle would be marriage. Just as a woman and a man are uniquely designed to fit together and to complement one another, the marriage piece only fits in its intended place in the puzzle when marriage is between a man and a woman.

---

Is there a distinction between civil marriage and Christian marriage?

Yes. A civil marriage may be good and faithful and loving, many civil marriages are, but that doesn't make them Christian. Only Jesus and his church do that. For a marriage to be Christian it must be celebrated, blessed and lived out by faith in Jesus Christ and according to the teaching and practices of his church as revealed through Holy Scripture and tradition.

---

<sup>2</sup> Gen 2:24

<sup>3</sup> Mark 10:6-8

<sup>4</sup> Eph 5:31

---

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 fulfillment in a community of faithful love. What is the theological significance of: community companionship in marriage, bearing and raising children, the relationship between marriage and sexuality?

### Community Companionship in Marriage

The theological significance of community companionship in marriage originates in the Genesis creation narrative. The good blessing we all receive as those created in God's image, male and female,<sup>5</sup> is enhanced when we are not alone.<sup>6</sup>

Married community companionship is nicely described in *The Book of Alternative Services*, "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage:"

Marriage is a gift of God and a means of his grace, in which man and woman become one flesh. It is God's purpose that, as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love, they shall grow together and be united in that love, as Christ is united with his Church.<sup>7</sup>

Christian community companionship in marriage is characterized by giving of one's self, growing together and unity, all in love and in the context of the great Biblical metaphor of Bridegroom and Bride—Christ and his Church—male and female. Gender difference is the core framework upon which it all hangs.

There are other legitimate forms of Christian community companionship such as friendships. They, too, can be self-giving, in which people grow closer to one another and are united in love, but they are not and should not be marriages. Although, at their best, they can reflect and display the sacrificial love of Jesus, they cannot accurately and faithfully reflect and display the theological significance and truth of the great marriage metaphor—the uniting of Christ and his Church, Bridegroom and Bride.

### Bearing and Raising Children

The theological significance of bearing and raising children is also established in the Genesis creation account. Human beings, having been created by God in God's image, male and female, were blessed to be fruitful and multiply as they cleave together in one

---

<sup>5</sup> Gen 1:26-28

<sup>6</sup> Gen 2.18

<sup>7</sup> p541

flesh.<sup>8</sup> Procreation by couples of the same sex is impossible. To emulate procreation by surrogacy or some other means is, at best, Biblically and theologically problematic; at worst, fornication or adultery.

### The Relationship Between Marriage and Sexuality

The Christian Church's world view and standards regarding marriage and sexuality are quite different from contemporary civil ones. "The church," said Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, recently, "is quite clear that sex outside marriage is wrong. And marriage is between a man and a woman. That seems to be a pretty clear statement."

The theological significance of the relationship between marriage and sexuality also flows from the Genesis creation narrative. What Scripture says about marriage and sexuality is both clear and theologically significant. The blessedness, fruitfulness, multiplication, holding fast (cleaving to one another) and making one flesh together<sup>9</sup> take place and are lived out within marriage. Scripture is consistent in its teaching that fornication and adultery are forbidden. The only licit sexual activity is between one man and one woman who are married to each other.

To argue that since we no longer abide by Biblical dietary and fibre laws, we need not follow those to do with marriage and sexuality is problematic. Biblical discourse on marriage and sexuality is of an entirely different and much more significant theological order than that on dietary and fibre laws.

Jesus is also consistent on these matters. To use his silence on homosexual activity as an argument for his tacit approval on the matter is unconvincing to say the least. Jesus was also silent on pedophilia and incest.

---

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

Marriage was instituted by God as the means by which "wives and husbands become one flesh," are lovingly united "as Christ is united with his church," in "heart body and mind" so "they may be blessed in the procreation, care, and upbringing of children."<sup>10</sup>

Relationships, other than married ones, cannot make the participants one flesh in the Biblical sense, neither can they embody Christ being united with his church or the legitimate bodily union of man and woman resulting in the blessed procreation of children.

---

<sup>8</sup> Gen 1:26-28; 2:24; Mark 10:6-8; Eph 5:31

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> p541

---

How do you understand the sacramentality of marriage?

Marriage is sacramental in as much as it constitutes one of those "sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him."<sup>11</sup> As one of "Those five commonly called Sacraments,"<sup>12</sup> marriage is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace."<sup>13</sup> The outward and visible signs are the exchanging of vows and rings and the joining of hands by which God bestows the inward and spiritual one flesh grace which the husband and wife consummate sexually as they "know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love" and are "blessed in the procreation, care and upbringing of children."<sup>14</sup>

Marriage's sacramental context and purpose is that faith in the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ is quickened, strengthened and confirmed in the power of the Holy Spirit through Biblically constituted Christian marriage in which a man leaves his family, is joined to his wife and they become one flesh. Couples of the same sex cannot so embody the visible sign of such a sacramental, Biblical, context and purpose.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, ARTICLES OF RELIGION, XXV, p707

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p708

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, THE CATECHISM, p550

<sup>14</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services*, "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage," p541