

To the members of the Marriage Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to give input on the questions before our church regarding marriage, and especially same-sex marriage. I have been involved in this discussion for about a decade now, as Integrity chaplain and as an advocate for the full inclusion of LGBTTQ folks in the church at all levels, including marriage and ordination. On a personal note, I've also lost (and regained) my license to minister, lost several ministry positions over the years, and continue to work without a marriage license, so although I am straight and married with children, I feel a strong stake in this discussion, both for theological reasons and as an issue of fundamental human rights and social justice. My short responses to the commission's questions are as follows:

*How do you interpret what scripture says about marriage?* Scripture, as I read it, says many things about marriage. Throughout both Testaments there are many models of marriage and family which are taken as normative in their time, from the polygamy of the ancestor stories, to the one man / one woman understanding of first century Palestine, to the idealization of celibacy in the New Testament, to the strong covenantal relationship between David and Jonathan. The common thread seems to be long-term faithfulness and covenantal love as a foundation of family life. This covenantal love is ultimately a reflection of the Covenant between God and creation, and also of the union between the uncreated and created natures within the second person of the Holy Trinity.

*How do you understand the theological significance of gender difference in marriage?* I see virtually no theological significance of gender difference in marriage. The theological issue is that of the “two becoming one”, which is the essence of covenantal love. If we ascribe gender difference as theologically essential in that coming together, then we are also forced to analogize the male as Christ and the female as the Church, along with the non-equal form of subordination inherent in that analogy. This is exceedingly problematic, and theologically unnecessary. It is bad news both for queer folk and for women.

*Is there a distinction between civil marriage and Christian marriage?* In my understanding, civil marriage is a natural good, and part of a stable society. Christian marriage builds on this foundation by bringing the marriage into the presence of God and the Church for a blessing. In some ways, civil marriage is the “visible sign” of the “invisible grace” which is Christian marriage. Now that civil marriage in our context includes same-sex marriage, this should be part of our “visible sign”.

*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?* Friendship is a theological virtue, and one of the “four loves” (CS Lewis), and hence a participation in the God who is Love.

*bearing and raising children?* I would separate these two terms, as it is the raising of children which is theologically more significant to marriage than the biological bearing.

As God is Mother and Father to us all, so does our parenting of children image and embody the Parenting of God in relation to the whole cosmos. Adoption has just as much claim to this parenting as does biological birth.

*the relationship between marriage and sexuality?* Theologically, sexuality signifies the “oneing” or union of the relationship. However, it is problematic to draw out too close an analogy between spiritual union and sexual relation; it is a mystery rather than a set of mechanics.

*What is the difference between marriage and the blessing of a relationship?* Personally, I don't see much of a difference at all. In my mind, it is the blessing which makes a marriage a Christian (rather than simply a human) rite and reality. It is only because marriage had been so long denied to gay and lesbian couples, that the blessing of relationship, or covenanting liturgies, evolved. In fact, perhaps we should simply get out of the marriage business altogether ... leave it to the secular authorities, and then bless all marriages, gay and straight, within the church. Just a thought...

*How do you understand the sacramentality of marriage?* In the sacrament of marriage, the love between God and Creation, and between Christ and the Church, are signified by the union of two people exchanging vows of fidelity and love. As mentioned before, when gender is assigned by analogy to Christ and the Church, this eternalizes a gender polarity and hierarchy where there should not be one. “De-gendering” this sacrament (or at least seeing gender as “accidental” rather than “substantial” in the old Thomist terms) can save us from the heresy of assigning a gender to God, and from the ethical problem of setting maleness above femaleness. Ultimately, the “two becoming one” is a sacrament of the Incarnation: the two natures in perfect union in Christ.

Thank you for taking this submission into the consideration of the Commission.

Yours in the Peace of Christ,

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