

Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon
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The sad tragedy of the Anglican Church(es) is the inability or unwillingness to distinguish between two very different things: marriage and the blessing of friends. The advocates of gay marriage want the first, as if the union – sexual or otherwise of two persons of the same sex – was equivalent to Christian matrimony; the opponents resist the second as a distinction without a difference, as if the blessing of friends were really the same thing as matrimony.

If the whole debate were simply a matter of abstract individual rights based simply on the wishes and desires of consenting adults then, of course, let there be 'marriage' of whomever to whomever or whatever regardless of gender or of any restriction including multiple partners. But there is more at stake than the ideology of human rights. It is a question about matrimony and for the Christian Church(es), "*holy Matrimony*", what *The Book(s) of Common Prayer*, the classical standard of doctrine and worship for Anglicans, call "*The Solemnization of Matrimony*".

At the root of the word *matrimonium* is *mater* – mother – which makes procreation an inescapable and non-negotiable aspect of marriage, one of the reasons for the institution regardless of intent, capability, or age (one would do well to remember Sarah before laughing). Children are implicit in the sexual union of male and female which is not to say that sex is purely procreational any more than that it is simply recreational. This false dichotomy bedevils our current discourse, as if it were really all about a 'theology of sex', whatever that might possibly mean.

At issue theologically is where the matter of same-sex 'marriages' stands in relation to the *consensus fidelium*. For Anglicans, the *consensus fidelium* is embodied in the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Ordinal and the Book(s) of Common Prayer. In Canada, the Articles and the Ordinal are included in the 1962 Book of Common Prayer.

All three grant priority to the role and place of Scripture in matters of doctrine with respect to the three areas of doctrine: essential or creedal doctrine, polity or order, and moral doctrine, at the same time as recognizing the role and place of Tradition and Reason. The interplay of these three authorities is critical for the consideration of any kind of development of doctrine.

In Canada, the Solemn Declaration of 1893 declares the Anglican Church of Canada "*to be*" and desires that "*it shall continue, in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world as an integral portion of the One Body of Christ*"; in short, fully part of the Church Universal, referencing explicitly the exact conditions for that claim to

catholicity. It is a self-limiting document that commits the Canadian Church to being more than a provincial sect.¹

The Solemn Declaration commits the Anglican Church of Canada to upholding and maintaining “*the Doctrine, Sacraments and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in his Holy Word, and as the Church of England hath received and set forth the same*” in the Book of Common Prayer, the Ordinal and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and “*to transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity.*”

Any change or development of doctrine would have to be in concert and measured by this standard of commitment to catholicity and orthodoxy.

With respect to the heritage and connection to “*the Church of England throughout the world,*” now commonly referred to as the Anglican Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury has, at the very least, the responsibility of identifying what the mind of the Communion is within these commonly received principles of doctrine and order. The former Archbishop, Rowan Williams, outlined the situation very clearly in his 2007 Advent Letter with respect to the matter of biblical interpretation on the controversial issues of same-sex blessings and the ordination of practicing ‘homosexuals’.

But the deeper question is about what we believe we are free to do, if we seek to be recognisably faithful to Scripture and the moral tradition of the wider Church, with respect to blessing and sanctioning in the name of the Church certain personal decisions about what constitutes an acceptable Christian lifestyle. Insofar as there is currently any consensus in the Communion about this, it is not in favour of change in our discipline or our interpretation of the Bible.

This is why the episcopal ordination of a person in a same-sex union or a claim to the freedom to make liturgical declarations about the character of same-sex unions inevitably raises the question of whether a local church is still fully recognisable within the one family of practice and reflection. Where one part of the family makes a decisive move that plainly implies a new understanding of Scripture that has not been received and agreed by the wider Church, it is not surprising that others find a problem in knowing how far they are still speaking the same language.

In Canada, leaving aside for the moment the question about the nature and extent of synodical authority in matters of doctrine, the General Synod of 2007 recognised that the blessing of same-sex unions was a matter of doctrine, that it was not a matter of core doctrine in the sense of being creedal, and that local dioceses were not to be permitted

¹ See David Curry, “*The Solemn Declaration: The Net of Memory*,” Machray Review. No. 5, 1994 (1993 Eugene Forsey Memorial Lecture).

to proceed in allowing for the blessings of same-sex unions. Nonetheless there continues to be constant pressure upon the church and within the church to conform to the culture, a culture which is caught in the paradox of being at once post-Christian and post-secular.

The matter of same-sex blessings and/or marriages, though clearly not a matter of creedal or essential doctrine, belongs to the moral teachings of the Church which are also part of the *consensus fidelium*. The moral teachings of the Church concern the theological understanding of our humanity and establish the terms of discourse for that understanding in terms of Scripture, Tradition and Reason. In other words, the Scriptures are understood creedally and from that standpoint identify the main categories for discussion about human nature and moral behavior. The Creeds, as the distillation of the Scriptural teaching, identify as primary for the understanding of our humanity the categories of creation, redemption and sanctification.

Those categories provide the critical matrix and measure for any change or development of doctrine in the life of the Church. It is from the standpoint of these categories that the question of 'homosexual' or 'gay' marriage and same-sex blessings must be considered. The contemporary 'rights' discourse, in particular, needs to be located, too, within this larger spiritual understanding. Without that, there are only competing claims and assertions. Nowhere is this more evident than with respect to such terms of discourse as homosexual and heterosexual, and sexual orientation and marriage.

From the standpoint of the doctrine of creation, the primary and exclusive categories for the understanding of our humanity are, first, that we are made in the image of God and secondly, that we are male and female. From the standpoint of the doctrine of redemption, the primary category is that of our fallen and sinful humanity which stands in need of God's redeeming grace. From the standpoint of the doctrine of sanctification, the categories concern the ordered states of human life such as married or single, ordained or lay.

Scripture knows of no homosexual nature or orientation despite the many misrepresentations and mistranslations that suggest otherwise. Scripture however is fully conversant with the deceits and disorders of the human will and human affection. The narratives in *The Book of Genesis* are strikingly critical of sexual attraction as the primary basis for human relations as, for example, in the stories of Sarah and Rachel, both of whom are beautiful and yet remain barren until much later in their respective marriages to Abram and Jacob. Children are a divine gift subject to the divine will and not simply human desires or demands.

The traditions of moral theology arise from the intersection of ancient Greek and Roman cultures and Hebrew culture. For ancient Greece (and Rome), the mentoring

relationship of the Greeks, *ephebo-philia*, the love for the adolescent male by the older male, concerns a love of beauty both of body and soul, the social conventions of which Plato in *The Symposium* deconstructs and criticizes. But as Robin Lane Fox cogently puts it, "the Greeks did not have a notion of a 'homosexual nature'." (*The Classical World: An Epic History of Greece and Rome*, 2005, 2006, p.45).

Marriage in all of its 'changes' and developments is located within the traditions of moral theology, philosophically and scripturally, and in accord with the primary categories of male and female where procreation is at least implicit and assumed but is not the sole basis for marriage - from the standpoint of the Church, children are a gift of God and not a right of man. The moral theology of *amor* focuses as well on a doctrine of friendship, wonderfully expressed in Aelred of Rievaulx' 12th century treatise, "*On Spiritual Friendship*," with its intriguing reworking of "God is love" as "God is friendship". Set within a monastic setting, it speaks to the larger issues of companionship but outside of marriage.

Reason plays an active role in the understanding of Scripture and Tradition but operates in its own right, for instance in the traditions of natural philosophy/ theology. It is only in more recent times and with the emergence of a secular culture violently opposed to the sacred that the term homosexuality arises. It is a late 19th century term used by Havelock Ellis. Despite many assertions to the contrary that try to define it as a natural or created condition, it remains a social and psychological construct with no basis in the so-called hard sciences. But even if it were something biologically or genetically determined, how would that change the moral question? How would it alter the fundamental differentiation between male and female even in the rare cases of chromosome imbalances?

There is no rational basis for supplanting the Scriptural and traditional teaching about marriage. There is every reason for reclaiming the understanding about Christian marriage in the face of our contemporary confusions. There is even more reason for recovering something of the language and understanding of friendship without confusing it with marriage.

Early modernity, for example, explores the friendship between men that supports marriage between man and woman as well as the idea of friendship within marriage. In Shakespeare's "*The Merchant of Venice*", the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio is explicitly based upon all that lies "*within the eye of honour*" such that all that Antonio has lies at the disposal of his friend for the sake of Bassanio's pursuit of Portia's hand in marriage.

Alan Bray's book "*Friends*" and his book "*Homosexuality in Renaissance England*" treat the ways in which same-sex relations are different from or a parody of marriage between men and women, even a subversion of marriage. The point is that the category

of homosexuality is a social and psychological construct distinct from the relations of male and female and from the doctrine of marriage. This qualifies the extravagant claims of John Boswell's *Same-Sex Unions in Pre Modern Europe* (1994, e-book 2013). Camilla Paglia criticized Boswell's work noting that "*whatever medieval ceremonies of union he may have found, Boswell has not remotely established that they were originally homosexual in our romantic sense. Their real meaning has yet to be determined.*" Not just our romantic sense but our sense of the primacy of the erotic.

All of this brings out how complicated, controversial and confused the question of same-sex marriage is.

What is homosexuality? What does it mean? It means different things to different people. There is no consensus within the so-called gay culture about marriage since marriage is seen as the epitome of bourgeois, middle class life that 'gay culture' rejects. The present pressures come from an aspect of the gay culture which now seeks middle-class acceptance and even more than toleration demands celebration. But of what? Camilla Paglia's *The Joy of Presbyterian Sex* excoriates gay marriage as a betrayal of the creative and artistic impulses of gay counter culture – in her view, its true spirit – and as the betrayal of the Christian Church of its moral teachings. An atheist herself, she makes the argument that the Church should be true to itself.

The point is that there are major tensions within the advocacy culture of homosexuality so-called.²

The failure of the churches to hold firmly and without equivocation to the three classical reasons for Christian marriage³ results in the redefining of marriage to mean any kind of committed relationship, including same-sex partnerings. By omitting or rendering procreation merely "optional", the churches effectively reduce every marriage to 'gay marriages' and dishonour the institution of Christian marriage. Against the illusions of sexual fulfilment and the eroticising of friendship, a renewed understanding of Christian marriage is the call to maturity in love, to sacrifice and commitment, and to an acceptance of the God-given forms of our creatureliness, "*male and female he created them*". Equally, it means a recovery of the proper forms of friendship both within and without marriage.

Marriage is not just any kind of committed relationship. While it is a kind of friendship, it is not just any kind of friendship. It is the covenanted relation of "*this man and this*

² See David Curry, "*Feminism and Homosexuality: Love without Reason?*" in *The Anglican Church and Same-Sex Couples* (Dal Printing, Halifax, 1995); <http://thecountryparson.wordpress.com/love-without-reason-1995/>.

³ "*The hallowing of the union betwixt man and woman*"; "*the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord*"; "*the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, in both prosperity and adversity.*" BCP (Cdn. 1962), p. 564.

woman" in the "holy Estate of Matrimony" established by God and "instituted in the time of man's innocency" as our Canadian Prayer Book so wonderfully and theologically puts it in language which belongs to the classical *consensus fidelium* and which emphasizes its divine origins. Whatever the blessings of friendship, same-sex or otherwise, might mean, they cannot be the same thing as Christian marriage.⁴

The law, too, is part of our contemporary confusions. It is not the business of the church(es) to bless whatever the State determines. In the matter of marriage there is a curious reversal of situation. Marriage only became a legal matter in 1753 in England and by extension to the various outposts of empire. There was an unspoken concordat between church and state whereby the state recognized as legal what the church blessed as sacramental. This unspoken concordat has been unilaterally broken by the Canadian government.

While there are intriguing philosophical reasons why the political state should be concerned about marriage, they are entirely questions about *matrimonium* – about the family. If ignored, as Haemon says to his father Creon in Sophocles' play "Antigone", "you would rule a desert well." This ancient understanding about how the family plays an important role as the natural basis for political life speaks to our contemporary world. We might better ask what role the state has any longer in matters of matrimony, having negated any positive reason for its interest in legalizing such relationships. 'Marriage' has become essentially meaningless.

The task for the church(es) is to reclaim the understanding of the doctrine of Christian marriage; not re-invent marriage to suit the nostrums of the age. From the standpoint of the *consensus fidelium* to which Anglicans claim allegiance, the proposed changes to marriage to include same-sex couples would be a moral error.

The positive impulses in the gay 'marriage' debate concern "the inarticulate lonelinesses", to use Alistair Macleod's poignant phrase, which we all face in contemporary culture. The answer is not to confuse one thing with another but to work for a greater clarity and a deeper charity about two different things: friendship and marriage.

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⁴ David Curry, 'Christian Marriage: The Primacy of Forgiveness' in Mandate (USA), May/June 1998.

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