

Submission on the Commission on the Marriage Canon

Charles Cardinal-Wilson, B.A. (Hons), M.P.A.

I wish to make my submission to this commission both brief and direct. Before I begin, I wish to introduce myself as someone who is more liberal in theology, however, I do have major concern with the changes to the marriage canon as proposed. I will limit my comments to two issues, theology and ecclesiology.

Theology

There is continued discussion over the church as to if the blessing of same sex union changes the theology of marriage. Although, I am of the opinion that current theological understanding of marriage in the Anglican Church is clear that it is the union of a man and woman to the exclusion of all others. For the most part, Anglican theology is found through the work of the liturgy, which clearly present this theology of marriage. The blessing of same sex relationships from those which are already in committed same sex relations, many of which is married by civil authorities, was seen to be a pastoral issue.

I would assume a theological debate on the topic would almost have to restart these discussions over if the church should proceed with the blessing of same sex relationships. I believe there is a need to have a comprehensive discussion of the theology of marriage in the church. We have made a number of changes throughout the course of the past four decades which have theological implications which has to some degree be ignored by the church. Further, there are further discussion which I believe is needed in order to create a common understanding of theology of marriage in the church.

I for one was married outside a church building, after several years of being an intimate relationship with my wife, and for the foreseeable future have no interest in procreation. The understanding of the theology of marriage as articulated in our marriage liturgy does not fit my relationship. What does this say about the sacrament of marriage within the Church? I was told in one parish that I should not have a leadership position in the church since I was in an intimate relationship outside of marriage, whereas other churches embraced my leadership.

I do not believe that a debate that started with the theology of marriage has occurred in the church. As a result, I am unsure if there is enough of an understanding of the theology of marriage between a man and woman to the exclusion of all others has occurred in the church. As a result, I believe it is premature to have a discussion of expanding the definition the theology of marriage to all that civilly eligible to marry.

While I understand the desire to include all who are civilly eligible for marriage to be married in the church, I do not believe we are in a position to expand our definition of marriage.

Ecclesiology

I want to just quickly mention the ecclesiastical element of this decision. We are the Anglican Church, the Via Media, and as such we have an obligation to ensure that the variety of theological and ecclesiastical opinions in the church on the marriage of same sex individuals are respected.

I am convinced that General Synod alone has the authority under our canons to regulate the understanding of marriage, but for the good of the church should it. Can the Anglican Church of Canada afford to undergo another 6, 9, or 12 years of division over same sex relationships? Can the Church Universal afford to undergo the same division for the foreseeable future?

In some ways, I maintain that it is way in which we decide issues. We are and have been since the Council of Nicene, a church of councils. Doctrine comes from discussions of theologians on theology. Can we proceed with changes to the theological understanding of marriage without respectful theological discourse on this topic. The church generally is a slow moving vehicle on these topics. I do not foresee the benefit of rushing into debates that could have profound theological and ecclesiastical outcomes without engaging in long time in a process that change our understanding of the union of marriage.

I further believe there are issues on canon law that needs to be resolved on this issue. It would seem appropriate in my opinion to present a reference question to the supreme court of appeal to seek clarification on the issues of canon law. I know there is hesitation on the part of the church to seek guidance in this way, but I believe there is a need to go down this road to ensure the process is clear and transparent.

Conclusion

I want to conclude that this discussion is difficult for me. I know many people in same sex relationships, which I am sure given to them as a blessing from God. I know people in same sex relationships that put most heterosexual relationships to shame. I am sure there is the love from God in these relationships, but there is a process to be followed. I would without hesitation say that a marriage of these relationships in the church is blessed, but we must follow a process to ensure that the church respects the results.

Respectfully yours,

Charles Cardinal-Wilson, B.A. (Hons), M.P.A.