

Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon

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The following comments derive from my own beliefs and thoughts which have been informed by many years' of involvement and worship in the Anglican Church, influenced also by discussions with friends and co-parishioners.

I am not in favour of altering the Marriage Canon and will outline some of my reasons for this position.

A change as drastic as altering a canon resets the doctrinal undergirding of the Anglican Church of Canada, permanently affects the religious life of the church and inevitably alters the relationship with other provinces in the Anglican Church and with other Communion. I shall base my opinion on the common view of the elements of authority in the Anglican Church: Scripture, Tradition, and Reason¹.

Scripture:

- (a) Complementarity: Unbiased reading of the Scriptures reveals a clear message that God's intention for human sexual relations is limited to that between one man and one woman for life and this forms the foundation of family. Recent challenges to this teaching relate mainly to interpreting the scriptures to include sexual relations between people of the same gender as being part of God's design. It is for this accommodation that some are seeking to have the Marriage Canon changed.
Nowhere in scripture is same-gender sexual relationship explicitly advised nor permitted. Several important teachings in both the Old Testament and the New Testament are clear that God created humans with the clear intent that male and female, man and woman, are complementary to each other and that together they comprise the fullness of humankind (Gen. 1:27; 5:2). Jesus underlines this essential complementarity in his response to a challenge regarding divorce: "...from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Mark 10:6-8).
- (b) Spiritual symbolism: There is a staggering and mystical representation of the Christ's relationship with His Church in the relationship between a man and a woman, to the extent that the Church is called the Bride of Christ. (John 3:29; Rev. 21:17)
- (c) Interpretation: Many various interpretations have been attempted to justify a hermeneutic supporting sexual unions other than one-woman-and-one-man as part of God's design for humanity. An example is the use of Levitical laws which have been ignored or canceled thereby justifying the abrogation of the rejection of same-gender sexual relations. Such analogic interpretations ignore the obvious distinction that Jesus makes between the ceremonial/purity laws/rules and the moral commandments. Thus, Jesus ignores the prohibitions against touching dead bodies, lepers and "unclean" persons (Luke 7:12-14; Mat. 8:2; Mt. 9:20-22); associating, in their homes, with "sinners" and gentiles (Mk 2:16-17); violating the Sabbath rules (Mt. 12:1-2); ceremonial ablutions (Mk. 7:2-8); kosher food (Mk. 7:18-22). At the same

¹ Ronald C. Stevenson: **An Anglican understanding of authority**, A paper prepared for presentation to the Anglican Baptist international conversations (North American session) Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada September 10 – 12, 2003

time, Jesus clearly endorsed the moral laws encompassed by the Commandments given to the world through Moses (Mt. 5:17-18). Beyond this, Jesus intensified the application of the moral laws to apply to imaginations and desires as well as to actions (Mt. 5:28). Moreover, Jesus made clear that the laws were not rigidly limited but apply broadly in the realms of each commandment (Mk. 7:20-23). Further examples of the logical extrapolation of the laws is given in the Holy Spirit's teaching through the Apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1:8-11). In this latter scripture, Paul relates practical implications of several of the Commandments. Thus, I believe that the Scriptures do not support the appeal to abrogation of the ceremonial and holiness laws to justify annulling the prohibitions within the Commandments of same-gender sexual activity. (There is likely no answer as to why the cleanliness and ceremonial Levitical laws and rules were established, and then annulled by Jesus. My own interpretation is that they were initial means of establishing an understanding of the searing holiness of YHWH to the Hebrew tribe which had been chosen to be the repository of God's revelation and the family of the coming Messiah/Saviour.)

Tradition:

The tradition of the Anglican Church of Canada regarding marriage clearly limits this "holy estate" to one woman and one unrelated man for life. Moreover, there is the expectation that this union is the foundation of the family wherein we pray (BCP) that God may bestow the "heritage and gift of children". Indeed, marriage is, in part, intended "for the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord". Moreover, matrimony signifies "the mystical union between Christ and his Church". This revealed analogy is of intense spiritual significance within the Anglican tradition.

Reason:

I shall briefly outline my positions in this regard under the headings, Anatomy, Physiology, Psychology, and Sociology.

Anatomy: There is no question but that the man and the woman are created with complementary anatomy for sexual congress. In this complementarity, the two become "one". Although sexual "release" may be achieved apart from this design, the natural process requires the man's penis and the woman's vagina. (It is of wonder that, probably unique amongst vertebrate creatures, humans may engage in coitus while embracing and kissing one another; that is, face to face.) The human vagina is clearly designed for sexual intercourse and no other organ nor orifice is so designed. Moreover, the same passage for coitus becomes the channel of the birth of the offspring created through the act of coitus. No other anatomic arrangement is so designated.

Physiology: The physiology of sexual intercourse is well-described in any number of texts and papers. The ecstasy and parasympathetic "release" of orgasm naturally produces a desire to perform coitus. The outcome of such orgasm has further purpose only in the relations between and woman and a man, for it is only in this coupling that procreation and new life are naturally possible. So the "two shall become one", regarding the establishment of family applies only in the heterosexual union. The complexity of procreation is an exquisite design beyond the realm of chance. The complex DNA helix divides, then recombines with new genetic elements to

produce the new generation of human beings. Same-gender unions must always involve a third person to produce offspring.

Psychology/sociology:

I am less competent to discuss issues in these realms. The Church arose in cultures where women and children were denigrated, with the effect that there was an imbalance of male to female sex-ratios²³. Stark claims that the Church's "condemnation of divorce, incest, marital infidelity and polygamy" was a factor in the rapid growth of church membership⁴. Thus the ethos of the Church from the beginning upheld family as father-mother-children.

While the maintenance of the Marriage Canon as it is disappoints some members of the ACC, to change the Canon will create discord and division both within the ACC and amongst the larger world-wide Anglican Communion and the Universal Church. There will be many beloved members departing from our churches. Sadly, many already have departed following the permission of blessing of same-sex marriages. Moreover, there is no assurance that Priests in the Anglican Church of Canada would be legally exempted from having to perform marriage against their conscience even if the Church composes a "conscience" clause. So we will see a flight of priests.

Suffice it to say that within the Christian ethos, longing for something, sexual or otherwise, does not, in itself, justify satisfaction of the longing, nor does it necessitate satisfaction.

Summary: To alter the definition of marriage by changing the Marriage Canon, will inevitably bring about major changes within the church and possibly within our culture. That alternate "lifestyles" function and are practiced within our society does not mean that the church must alter its fundamental doctrines and practices. There is furthermore the distinct possibility that, if we were to alter the Marriage Canon of the ACC, there will be no logical or doctrinal reason for the Church to reject the sanctification of polygamy, incest, or other novel sexual arrangements.

I believe that Scripture, Tradition and Reason support the maintaining of the Marriage Canon as it presently exists.

Respectfully submitted,

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² J.C. Russell, Late and Medieval Populations 1958

³ Kenneth Phillbrick, Thesis, April 2014: Epidemic Smallpox, Roman Demography, and the Rapid Growth of Early Christianity, 160 CE to 310 CE

⁴ Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity 1996