

A review of the report on 'The theology of Marriage'
by the Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Introduction

On 14 June 2015 the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church voted to open the door to the 'marriage' of same-sex couples. It did so by changing its Canon relating to marriage.

Canon 31 of its Code of Canons, 'Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony' currently declares in clause 1: 'The Doctrine of this Church is that Marriage is a physical, spiritual and mystical union of one man and one woman created by their mutual consent of heart, mind and will thereto, and is a holy and lifelong estate instituted of God.' What has been agreed is that if the necessary 2/3 majorities in the General Synod are achieved during a two year process beginning in 2016 this clause will be deleted. By removing any reference in the Canon to marriage being between a man and a woman this change would allowed the 'marriage' of same-sex couples in the churches of the Scottish Episcopal Church from 2017

General Synod also voted to add a conscience clause that would ensure that no member of the clergy would be obliged to solemnise a same-sex 'marriage.'

The debate in the General Synod was resourced by a report on *The Theology of Marriage* from the Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church¹ which set out the arguments for three options:

Option A. No change in the Canons, and hence maintaining a definition of marriage as a union 'of one man and one woman.'

Option B. A change in the canons such as will enable the SEC to incorporate same-sex marriage.

Option C. moderate change or parallel provision, allowing for blessings of same-sex covenant partnerships.²

This paper will examine the arguments put forward in the report in support of Option B, which was the option voted for by the General Synod. These arguments will be considered under the four headings used in the report.

Marriage as for procreation

Under this heading the report puts forward four arguments in response to the idea that because procreation is one of the reasons for marriage same-sex 'marriage' is therefore unacceptable.

First, it argues that the 'primary reason' why God provides a companion for Adam in Genesis was not procreation, but because 'it is not good for man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). It is this 'social imperative' that is the reason why God creates Eve. Furthermore, when Jesus (Mark 10:8) and St. Paul (1 Corinthians 6:16) refer to the teaching of Genesis about a 'one flesh' sexual union between a man and a woman in marriage 'they never mention procreation' but instead 'emphasise sexual fidelity and indissoluble union.'³

¹ The report can be found at <http://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Doctrine-Committee-Theology-of-Marriage.pdf>

² Ibid, pp.1-2.

³ Ibid, p.16

Secondly, it argues that it is reductive to see 'one flesh union' solely in terms of procreation and physical sexual activity and that while procreation is a purpose of marriage that relates to creation as it now is, non-procreative relationships 'populate God's new creation and our eschatological future.'⁴

Thirdly, it argues that non-procreative sexual unions that focus on purposes for loving union other than procreation can 'transform and enrich what it means to bring forth children and sustain a family system.' In this way, it says, 'same sex marriage, and other non-procreative unions, can be exceptions that enhance rather than undermine the institution of marriage.'⁵

Furthermore, same-sex marriage can be seen to be in accordance with nature given that having a homosexual orientation can be seen to be natural amongst animals and for some human beings.⁶

Fourthly, it argues that 'the healthy nature and education of children does not depend on sexual differentiation between parents and carers.' The report declares that 'children of homosexual parents experience broadly similar outcomes than those of heterosexual parents and that the quality of parenting is of greater significance than the sexual orientation of the parents'⁷

What are we to make of these arguments ?

1. It is a mistake to separate Genesis 1 and 2.

It is a misreading of Genesis to separate the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2. The way the book of Genesis is constructed the reader is expected to have read Genesis 1 first and to read Genesis 2 in the light of it. This means that Genesis 2 needs to be seen as a narrative expansion of Genesis 1:26-28 explaining in the form of a story how God created human beings as male and female. This being the case, the sexual union between man and woman in marriage referred to in Genesis 2:24 needs to be seen in the light of the command to 'be fruitful and multiply' in Genesis 1:28. It is the God given means for that command to be fulfilled. Marriage and procreation go together as we subsequently see in Genesis 3:15-16 and Genesis 4:1-2.

2. While marital love cannot be reduced to procreation, procreation is a key part of marriage.

It is true that we should not reduce marital love to procreation or physical sexual activity. There is also, or at least there should be, a union of hearts and minds. However, this does not mean that the capacity for procreation is irrelevant to what marriage is about. The fact that marriage is more than a means for producing babies does not mean that this is not one of the key purposes of marriage and that marriage does not need to be structured in such a way as to achieve this end by being between a man and a woman.

In their important article 'What is marriage?' in the Winter 2011 edition of *the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* (Vol 34, No 1 pp.18-19), S Girgis, R P George and R T Anderson helpfully illustrate the difference between marriage and same-sex relationships in this regard using the analogy of a baseball team:

Consider this analogy: A baseball team has its characteristic structure largely because of its orientation to winning games; it involves developing and sharing one's athletic skills in the way best suited for honorably winning (among other things, with assiduous practice and

⁴ Ibid, p.17.

⁵ Ibid, pp.17-18.

⁶ Ibid, pp.18-19.

⁷ Ibid, p.19.

good sportsmanship). But such development and sharing are possible and inherently valuable for teammates even when they lose their games. Just so, marriage has its characteristic structure largely because of its orientation to procreation; it involves developing and sharing one's body and whole self in the way best suited for honorable parenthood—among other things, permanently and exclusively. But such development and sharing, including the bodily union of the generative act, are possible and inherently valuable for spouses even when they do not conceive children. Therefore, people who can unite bodily can be spouses without children, just as people who can practice baseball can be teammates without victories on the field. Although marriage is a social practice that has its basic structure by nature whereas baseball is wholly conventional, the analogy highlights a crucial point: Infertile couples and winless baseball teams both meet the basic requirements for participating in the practice (conjugal union; practicing and playing the game) and retain their basic orientation to the fulfilment of that practice (bearing and rearing children; winning games), even if that fulfilment is never reached. On the other hand, same-sex partnerships, whatever their moral status, cannot be marriages because they lack any essential orientation to children: They cannot be sealed by the generative act.

It is also true that Mark 10:8 and 1 Corinthians 6:16 are silent about the one flesh union of Genesis 2:24 involving procreation. This silence is not surprising given that a mention of procreation would have been irrelevant to the argument in both verses. What would have been surprising and contentious, and would therefore have left a mark on the New Testament record, would have been if either Jesus or St. Paul had rejected a link between marriage and the fulfilment of Genesis 1:28 since such a link was held to be axiomatic in first century Judaism. Their silence on the matter can thus be seen as providing evidence that they regarded Genesis 1:28 and marriage as belonging together.

The fact that the union between husband and wife in marriage cannot be reduced to either procreation or sexual activity in general does not mean that these are not a vital part of what marriage is about. In the Christian tradition marriage has been seen as a loving union between a man and a woman involving sexual activity (non-consummation being a ground for annulment) and oriented towards the procreation of children. It is this report that is being reductionist by arguing that an orientation towards the procreation of children should be seen as optional.

3. Procreation is relevant for the world to come.

The report is wrong to argue that procreation has only to do with this world and that it is non-procreative relationships that populate the world to come. Those who will inhabit the world to come will have first have to have been born into this world and for that procreation is necessary. Having children who are 'brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord,' as the *Book of Common Prayer* marriage service puts it, is therefore an important part of producing citizens for the kingdom of heaven. In the words of the homily 'Of the state of Matrimony' in the Second Book of Homilies, marriage is ordained:

...that the Church of God and his kingdom, might by this kind of life be conserved and enlarged, not only in that God giveth children, by his blessing, but also, in that they be brought up by the parents godly, in the knowledge of God's word; that thus the knowledge of God, and true religion, might be delivered by succession, from one to another, that finally, many might enjoy that everlasting mortality.⁸

⁸ I Robinson (ed), *The Homilies*, Bishopstone: Brynmill/ Preservation Press, 2006, p.363.

And this is not just theory or pious aspiration. It is what has actually happened. For example, the American writer Rodney Stark has argued in his study *The Rise of Christianity*, one of the reasons that the Early Church grew so fast was not just because Christians converted people (although they did), but because Christians had a fertility rate that was a lot bigger than that of the population as a whole.⁹

4. Non-procreative unions are not needed to enhance traditional marriage.

It is hard to see why non-procreative sexual unions are needed in order to transform and enrich traditional marriage. It simply is not the case that those in traditional marriages are focused purely on having children and therefore neglect other forms of the loving union between husband and wife. Those in traditional Christian marriages do not need same-sex relationships to teach them that marriage is not just about children, but about love between two people and what the Book of Common prayer calls 'the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.' Christians have known this, and sought to practice it, for almost two millennia.

Because it excludes procreation, what a same-sex version of marriage has to offer is in fact a reduced rather than enhanced version of what marriage is about. It is traditional Christian marriage that is marriage in all its fullness.

5. An appeal to nature in support of same-sex marriage does not work.

The argument that same-sex marriage is in accordance with nature is also problematic.

We cannot move from the alleged homosexual behaviour of other animals to what is natural for human beings as the report seeks to do because (a) according to Christian teaching they too have been affected by the Fall and (b) seeking to model human behaviour on the behaviour of animals raises the question of which aspects of their behaviour should provide us with our model.

As Patricia Morgan notes in her book *The Marriage Files*:

If animals do not find or are kept from mates, they may instinctively mount or engage in nesting behaviour with other males (It is commonplace that human prisoners resort to sodomy). Sexual activity among animals is seasonal. There is a surge in hormonal levels during a 'mating season' when males become very aggressive and will mount almost anything until finding a female. Male penguins copulate with dead bodies and engage in coercive sex with chicks that leads to death. What 'orientation' is the dog humping a table or trouser leg? A chimpanzee (Nim) trained to use human dialogue (by Herbert Terrace of Columbia University) is filmed trying to copulate with a pet cat. Many species are cannibalistic. Some eat their own young. It is usual for males who replace another in the pride (lions) or troupe (apes) to kill offspring of the previous male(s) before re-impregnating the females.¹⁰

What, if anything, are we meant to learn as the basis for our own conduct as human beings from this range of animal behaviour?

We have to learn what is natural for us as human beings and this does not simply mean what we or anyone else desires to do at a particular time, but what we are created to be and do by God.

Because of the Fall our behaviour and our understanding are both warped by sin (see Romans 1:18-

⁹ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997, Chapter 5.

¹⁰ Patricia Morgan, *The Marriage Files*, London: Wilberforce publications, 2014, p.116.

32). This means that we have to learn what we are meant to be like from God himself via his self-revelation in Holy Scripture. As we have seen, this tells us that human beings have been created as male and female and commanded to be fruitful and multiply and that God created marriage to be a sexual union between a man and a woman with procreation as one of its key purposes. When St. Paul tells us in Romans 1:26-27 that both gay and lesbian sexual activity is unnatural what he means is that it goes against the fact that God made us in this way.

Saying that homosexual activity is natural, as the report does, is thus a direct rejection of revelation, which cannot be justified by an appeal to the natural sciences since they can only tell us what we are now and not what we were originally meant to be.

6. It is misleading to assert that being part of same-sex families makes no difference to children.

Finally, the claim that the outcomes for children of same-sex couples are broadly similar to those for the children of opposite sex parents fails to take into account the important study by the American sociologist Mark Regenerus. Entitled 'How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships?' this article¹¹ was based on the New Family Structures Survey which surveyed a randomly selected sample of 15,000 Americans aged 18-39 and asked them about their lives. To quote Regenerus, the results for those surveyed whose mothers had had a same sex relationship:

...call into question simplistic notions of "no differences," at least with the generation that is out of the house. On 25 of 40 different outcomes evaluated, the children of women who've had same-sex relationships fare quite differently than those in stable, biologically-intact mom-and-pop families, displaying numbers more comparable to those from heterosexual stepfamilies and single parents. Even after including controls for age, race, gender, and things like being bullied as a youth, or the gay-friendliness of the state in which they live, such respondents were more apt to report being unemployed, less healthy, more depressed, more likely to have cheated on a spouse or partner, smoke more pot, had trouble with the law, report more male and female sex partners, more sexual victimization, and were more likely to reflect negatively on their childhood family life, among other things.¹²

Furthermore a 2013 study based by Douglas Allen which evaluated a 20% sample of the Canadian census reveals that the children of gay and lesbian couples are only about 65 percent as likely to have graduated from high school as the children of married, opposite-sex couples. And gender matters, too: girls are more apt to struggle than boys, with daughters of gay parents displaying dramatically low graduation rates.¹³

In addition to these academic studies there is a growing amount of testimony from the children of same-sex families who are saying that growing up in a family headed by two people of the same sex created significant difficulties for them both while they were growing up and in later life.¹⁴

¹¹ M Regenerus 'How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships?' *Social Science Research*, 41, 2012, pp.752-770.

¹² Mark Regenerus 'Gay parents, are they really no different?'

http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2012/06/gay_parents_are_they_really_no_different_.html

¹³ Allen, D. W. (2013). High school graduation rates among children of same-sex households. *Review of Economics of the Household*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.007/s11150-013-9220-y

¹⁴ See Robert Oscar Lopez & Rivka Edelman (eds), *Jephthah's Daughters: Innocent Casualties in the War for Family Equality*, Create Space, 2015.

In the light of this academic and anecdotal evidence simply asserting that these appears to be no difference in outcome is insufficient. At the very least the report should have noted that this remains a highly contested area of study on which there is no agreement.

What we do know, however, is the decades of research shows that children succeed best when they are brought up by married parents of the opposite sex.

Marriage as a remedy against sin

This section of the report begins with an excursus entitled 'Considerations from Scripture' which looks at what Scripture has to tell us about marriage and sexual activity. In this excursus the report declares:

We will not find in Scripture clear moral teaching on marriage and sexual expression for our modern times, not least because the cultures out of which the biblical texts arose were so different from our own, and often polygynous, and with ritualistic laws and contractual arrangements that we barely recognize, but also because some teaching, particularly that on divorce, is contested within Scripture itself. What we do find, more profoundly, is a range of biblical themes concerning marriage, which must inform any endeavour to develop a theology of marriage.¹⁵

The report sets out these themes in five bullet points as follows:

- marriage as companionship, with questions as to whether it is dissoluble or not;
- marriage as one area around which strict purity laws were taught at a period in Israel's history
- sexual relations as an area where we are to be mindful of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, and distinct from some 'Gentile' behaviours, i.e. behaviours of the surrounding culture (it is interesting to ask what might be equivalents today: pornography, prostitution, promiscuity and sex-trafficking might be contenders);
- marriage as a vocation, though not one to which all are called, and not one that is carried into our eschatological future;
- marriage as mirroring God's covenant faithfulness and Christ's self-giving love, such that as an ideal it is not dissoluble.¹⁶

In the part of this section setting out the arguments in favour of same-sex marriage the report then goes on to argue on the basis of the work of Jeffrey John and an article in the *Anglican Theological Review* that same-sex marriage should be seen as a 'remedy against sin' because it helps to order and discipline sexual desire within the bounds of Christian holiness and to prevent sexual promiscuity amongst gay men.¹⁷

It also argues that the fact that Scripture and 'the Christian world today' today make provision for polygamous relationships and that Scripture disagrees with itself about whether marriage is indissoluble shows that a 'lifelong 'one man one woman' relationship' is not a 'non-negotiable' characteristic of marriage in the Bible.¹⁸

¹⁵ *The Theology of Marriage* p.21.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.25.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.26-27 referring to Jeffrey John, *Permanent, Faithful, Stable*, London: DLT, 2012 and D J Good, W J Jenkins et al 'A Theology of Marriage including Same-Sex Couples: A view from the Liberals,' *Anglican Theological Review*, 93:1, pp.51-88.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.28.

Instead it suggests that we should learn from the Bible is to see marriage in terms of the covenant between God and Israel and the self-giving relationship between Christ and the Church. If so, it suggests, 'the pertinent questions that arise for us are 1.' Can such covenantal relationships be maintained faithfully between two persons, irrespective of gender?' 2. If both parties are of the same gender, what if anything distinguishes their covenanted union from 'marriage.'?¹⁹

In order to answer these questions the report then brings in an eschatological perspective:

Noting that the direction of Jesus' and Paul's thinking is towards the new creation in which marriage will have passed away, what does this mean for arguments today to extend the definition of marriage to include same-sex covenant partnerships? Theologically, though not culturally, we are living in the same 'times' as the NT 'times'; the 'times' when the Kingdom is among us but is not fully realized. Therefore, we live out the goodness of creation, whilst also anticipating and seeing signs of the new creation. So we live with the tension of recognizing that marriage is a good but that it is not a good that will continue into our eschatological future. That we are each to live out our calling (I Cor 7.17), is as true for us today as it was for the Christians in Corinth. Some of us are called to be married, some not, and the distinction does not fall according to our sexuality.²⁰

What are we to make of these arguments?

1. The teaching of the Bible is still relevant today

The argument that we cannot find clear moral teaching on marriage and sexual activity in Scripture because of the differences between the cultures out of which Scripture arose and our own overlooks the continuity between the issues addressed by the Bible and the issues we face today. The basic issues which the Bible addresses and which we still face today are the nature of marriage and whether it is right to have sex outside the bond of marriage and on both of these issues the Bible gives us clear teaching which remains equally relevant for our current culture.

2. The indissolubility of marriage is not contested in Scripture

The argument that the indissolubility of marriage is 'contested' in Scripture depends on the idea that there is a tension between the apparently absolute ban on divorce in Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18 and the permission for divorce in the case of serious sexual immorality (*porneia*) in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9. The answer to this apparent inconsistency is not that Matthew is weakening Jesus' teaching, but that he is making explicit what is implicit in the teaching as recorded in Mark and Luke namely the Jewish belief that 'adultery automatically annuls a marriage by creating a new sexual union in its place.'²¹

3. The five themes concerning marriage highlighted by the report all require qualification

Marriage does involve companionship, but as we have already seen, it is also about procreation.

There are strict purity laws relating to sex and marriage in the Old Testament, but there is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that these have been abrogated or relaxed under the new covenant. On the contrary they are strengthened with no space given to polygamy, with tighter rules on divorce (Matthew 19: 1-9) and with adulterous desires as well as actions being forbidden (Matthew 5:27-30).

¹⁹ Ibid, p.28.

²⁰ Ibid, pp.28-29.

²¹ R T France, *Matthew*, Leicester, IVP. 1975, p.123.

According to the New Testament being mindful of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and not living like the gentiles means having sex only within marriage and not engaging in same-sex relationships (1 Corinthians 5:1-7:40, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8).

The only marriage which the Bible knows about is marriage between people of the opposite sex. There is no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that people are called by God to marriages between people of the same-sex.²²

It is true that marriage is for this life only (Luke 20:34-36) but this does not mean that we should not take seriously what the Bible tells us about the nature of marriage in this life.

The New Testament never bases the indissolubility of marriage on the fact that marriage mirrors 'God's covenant faithfulness and Christ's self-giving love,' but on the fact that God ordained the life-long character of marriage at creation (Matthew 19:3-6).

4. Same-sex marriage cannot act as a remedy against sin

The argument that same-sex marriage can be a 'remedy against sin' because it helps to order and discipline sexual desire within the bounds of Christian holiness and to prevent gay men engaging in sexual promiscuity sees the problem with same-sex sexual activity as lying in the way that it is conducted. It suggests that if such activity ceased to be promiscuous and was conducted instead within the bounds of permanent, faithful and stable Christian relationships then it would cease to be sinful.

In the Bible, however, no distinction is made between different forms of same-sex sexual activity. Such activity is seen as sinful per se because it falls outside the limits for sexual activity laid down by God at creation and is therefore forbidden by God's law (Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:10). A same-sex marriage can therefore no more be a remedy against sin than an adulterous or incestuous marriage would be.

5. Lifelong monogamous heterosexual marriage is a non-negotiable

The argument that the existence of polygynous relationships and disagreement within Scripture about whether marriage is indissoluble shows that a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman cannot be seen as a non-negotiable characteristic of marriage in the Bible is flawed for two reasons.

- a. As we have already seen, there is no disagreement in Scripture over whether marriage is indissoluble. It is intended by God to be life long, but it can be terminated by serious sexual immorality or by desertion by an unbelieving spouse.
- b. The model for marriage laid down by God in Genesis 1 and 2 is monogamous. From the time of Lamech onwards (Genesis 4:19) polygamy becomes a feature of a fallen world, but Jesus (Matthew 19:3-6) goes back to God's original standard and the New Testament and the subsequent Christian tradition has followed his lead.²³ The limited provision for the acceptance of polygamous relationships in the Anglican Communion is not due to a

²² For this point see Michael Brown, *Can you be Gay and Christian?* Lake Mary: Front Line, 2014, pp.84-90.

²³ See Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh – Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007, Chapter 5 and page 638.

questioning of the biblical standard, but due to a desire to make compassionate pastoral provision for those in polygamous relationships at the time they come to faith.²⁴

Neither element of the argument shows that a life-long monogamous marriage is not what was ordained by God at creation and should not therefore form the non-negotiable basis for Christian theology and practice.

6. It is the account of creation that forms the basis for our understanding of the nature of marriage.

The idea that the covenant between God and Israel and the relationship between Christ and the Church should form the basis for our understanding of marriage ignores the fact that in Scripture it is the account of creation that tells us what marriage is. It is true that in Ephesians 5:21-32 St. Paul suggests that Genesis 2:24 points prophetically to the relationship between Christ and His Church and that this relationship of self-giving love provides the model for the conduct of Christian marriages, but St. Paul still assumes that we learn what marriage is from the text of Genesis.

Within the literary structure of the Bible it is because we know what marriage is from Genesis 1 and 2 that the subsequent metaphorical descriptions of God's relationship with his people being like a marriage make sense. It is the use of marriage in this metaphorical way that is derivative not our understanding of the nature of marriage. The report has thus got things the wrong way round.

Because the metaphorical use of marriage as an image for God's relationship with his people is derived from the reality of marriage as ordained by God this relationship is always seen as monogamous and between a bride and a groom.²⁵ It therefore follows that even if one were to try to build a theology of marriage on the metaphorical use of marriage in Scripture it would still provide no support for the idea of same-sex marriage.

The fact that we live in the time between the times in which the kingdom has broken in but is still awaited is irrelevant to the question of the nature of marriage. The nature of marriage was laid down at creation and as long as we are still part of this creation we have to honour it. According to the New Testament living in the light of the coming kingdom does not mean repudiating what God laid down at creation but responding to it with greater faithfulness – hence universal monogamy, and a stronger line against divorce.

Mutual comfort and support

In this section the report offers four arguments.

First it questions the circularity of the argument that same-sex partnerships cannot count as marriages because marriage is an exclusive lifelong partnership between one man and one woman. It declares that:

..the matter under consideration is whether we are bound to that definition, or whether there is benefit in expanding it. Already we recognize partnerships that are not exclusive or lifelong are nonetheless marriages.²⁶

Secondly, it suggests that developing a gender neutral form of marriage would open up marriage for those who don't fit into the binary categories of male or female, because they have an intersex

²⁴ For this see resolution 26 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference in R Coleman (ed) *Resolutions of the Lambeth Conferences 1867-1988*, Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992, pp.211-212.

²⁵ See, for example, Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 2:1-3, Hosea 2, Ephesians 5:21-32, Revelation 21:1-4.

²⁶ *The Theology of Marriage* p.29.

condition, see themselves as 'both male or female, or neither' or who are transsexual or transgender and therefore 'may experience tension between their biological sex and their experienced sex or socially constructed gender.'²⁷

Thirdly, it contends that same-sex marriages would provide 'healing' and 'positive role-models' for homosexual people which are needed because of the negative messages that they have received from the Church and society.²⁸

Fourthly, it argues people who are married complement each other because of who they are and the way that their relationships develop and not because men and women are essentially complementary to each other.

Arguments from complementarity and difference operate with over-generalised characterisations that can easily lead to type-casting, and for this reason complementarity arguments are often experienced as oppressive. Even if it could be established that women are generally better at reading emotions and men are generally better at reading maps, it would be hard to see how this might carry theological significance. Couples find themselves to complement one another, and to grow in complementing one another, as their relationship develops, regardless of their sex or sexuality.²⁹

What are we to make of these arguments?

1. Anglican churches do not recognise non-exclusive or temporary partnerships as marriages

It is true that the argument is about whether the traditional definition of marriage should be expanded, but it is misleading to suggest that the Church recognizes partnership that are not exclusive or lifelong as marriages.

The recognition of the existence of polygamous relationships by Anglican churches does not mean that these are seen as authentic Christian marriages. That is why the churches involved do not solemnize such relationships or teach that it is right for Christians to enter into them.

In a similar fashion, those Anglican churches that marry people who have been divorced and have a former spouse still living do so on the understanding that the new marriage is intended to be for life. No provision is made for people to enter into a temporary, time limited, form of marriage.

No Anglican church has therefore departed from the traditional Anglican and biblical understanding of marriage in either of these cases and it is a mistake to argue that they have.

2. Moving to gender neutral marriage would not help people with intersex conditions or those who are transsexual or transgendered.

As we have seen, the teaching of Scripture is that God created human beings to be either male or female. Nevertheless, one of the results of the brokenness of the fallen world we inhabit is that there are people whose sex is difficult to determine or (people with intersex conditions) and people whose biological sex is clear but who find it difficult to accept or live out their given sexual identity (transsexual or transgendered people).

²⁷ Ibid, p.30.

²⁸ Ibid, p.30.

²⁹ Ibid, p.30.

What people in either of these situations need is help to live as far as possible according to their God given sexual identity as male or female (even though in the case of intersex people this identity can sometimes be difficult to determine because the evidence may appear to be ambiguous). It is hard to see how introducing a gender neutral form of marriage would help them with this process. Indeed it might hinder it by sending out a message that it is unnecessary to seek to live out one's given sexual identity as male or female. Telling people facing a difficult struggle that their struggle is unnecessary is not either a truthful or a helpful thing to do.

3. Same sex marriages will not be helpful for those with same-sex attraction.

There is no doubt that people with same-sex attraction have received 'negative messages' from both the Church and society. In so far as these negative messages were that same-sex sexual activity is wrong and should not take place they were justified. However, if they implied that people with same-sex attraction had less value as people or were somehow more sinful than anyone else they were unjustified.

On the other hand, it is precisely because people with same-sex attraction are human just like everyone else that they too are called to live out their sexual identity as men and women either in marriage to someone of the opposite sex or in a life of singleness. They have the same calling as every other human being in this regard.

The establishment of same-sex marriages will do nothing to help those with same-sex attraction to live out this fundamental human vocation. Indeed they will potentially make it more difficult by sending out a message that trying to live out this vocation is unnecessary. Similarly, those in such marriages will not be able role models for how to live out this vocation because they are not living out themselves.

4. The importance of the complementarity between men and women is not something that can simply be set aside.

The denial that the complementarity between men and women is relevant to the existence of complementarity in marriage is highly problematic. It involves a rejection of all the evidence from the biological and social sciences that men and women are different from each other in a whole variety of significant ways and that the positive combination of these differences is vital for human life in general and for marriage in particular.³⁰

It also fails to make any sense of the teaching of the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 and the subsequent teaching of Jesus that God's creation of human beings as male and female and his bringing them together in marriage are the bedrock of human existence. If there is no differentiation in unity, no complementarity, between men and women, why do Genesis and Jesus teach that there is and that it is so important?

The calling of Christian theology is surely to make sense of the relationship between men and women established by God, not to deny its existence.³¹

³⁰ See Werner Neuer, *Men and Women in Christian perspective*, Leicester: Crossway 1991, Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ*, Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1981, John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, London: Harper Element 2012.

³¹ For an exploration of this point see Christopher C Roberts, *Creation and Covenant*, London: T&T Clark 2007.

Marriage as reflecting the love of Christ for the Church and the very nature of God's character and love.

The report puts forward two arguments in this section.

First, just like traditional marriage, same-sex marriage can 'also signify the mystical union between Christ and the Church.' Drawing on the work of Robert Song and Rowan Williams it suggests that this is because sexual relationships, including same-sex relationships, can point us to the love that God has for us. This is because the experience of mutual desire between human beings points us towards the way in which in Christ God desires us as if we ourselves were God.³²

Secondly, the authority of the Scottish Book of Common Prayer of 1929 can be upheld even if the marriage Canon is altered because (a) the Scottish Episcopal Church gives authority to all authorised liturgies and not just to the Scottish Prayer Book and (b) 'it is anyway not clear from the Prayer Book that marriage between a man and a woman is the only form of relationship that can reflect the mystical union between Christ and the Church.'³³

What are we to make of these arguments?

1. Same-sex relationships are a sign of estrangement from God rather than a sign of the union between Christ and his church.

In response to the first of these arguments, we need to note that there is nowhere in Scripture where sexual desire as such is seen as mirroring the love that God has for us. It is always the love between husband and wife more generally rather than sexual love in the abstract that fulfils this role.

Furthermore, according to Scripture what the existence of same-sex relationships actually signifies is the fact that human beings have rejected the knowledge of God given in the created order and have therefore become disordered in their understanding and behaviour (see Romans 1:18-32). This means that same-sex relationships are a sign of the estrangement from God which is overcome by the mystical union between Christ and the Church.

For the Church to solemnize same-sex marriages would thus amount to a liturgical rejection of the purpose of the mystical union of which the love between husband and wife is a sign.

2. The acceptance of same-sex relationships would involve a rejection of the theological tradition represented by the 1929 Scottish Prayer Book.

In response to the second argument, it is true that in the Scottish Episcopal Church all forms of liturgy are equally authoritative. It is also true that the 1929 Scottish Prayer Book does not explicitly teach that marriage between a man and a woman is the only form of relationship that can reflect the mystical union between Christ and the Church.

However, we know historically that those who drew up the 1929 Prayer Book would have seen a marriage between a man and a woman as the only form of marriage given by God to represent the relationship between Christ and his Church. In 1929 all orthodox Christian theologians, including those in the Scottish Episcopal Church, would have regarded homosexual activity as a sin and a 'marriage' between two people of the same-sex as a theological impossibility. The reason that the 1929 Prayer Book does not rule out same-sex partnerships was not because those who compiled it

³² *The Theology of Marriage* pp.32-33.

³³ *Ibid* pp.34-36.

wanted to leave room for them, but because such relationships were so obviously wrong that they were not even worth mentioning.

What this means is although the proposal to allow same-sex 'marriages' in the Scottish Episcopal Church may not formally involve a rejection of the authority of the 1929 Prayer Book, materially it involves the rejection of the authority of the tradition of Christian thought which that Prayer Book represents. The tradition represented by the 1929 Prayer Book says that marriage is, by God's design, exclusively a relationship between a man and woman. What is proposed only makes sense if this tradition is wrong and if it is wrong then it can no longer be seen as having authority.

Conclusion

As we have seen, none of the arguments put forward in support of same-sex 'marriage' in the report from the Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church are persuasive. Their arguments simply do not show that this is a development that has the support of either Scripture, tradition or reason.

What these arguments propose is that a relationship between two people of the same-sex can have the same value within Christian theology as a marriage between a man and a woman and that it provides an equally beneficial setting for the raising of children. As we have seen in this paper, the first of these arguments is definitely wrong and there is a growing body of evidence that the second is wrong as well.

M B Davie 28.7.15