



The Doctrine Commission Of the Anglican Church of Australia

Report of the Doctrine Commission to the Standing Committee on the Cohabitation of a Man and Woman.

1. At the March 2006 meeting of the General Synod Standing Committee, the following resolution was agreed to:
That the Standing Committee refers to the Doctrine Commission the preparation of a report dealing with the following questions regarding the cohabitation of a man and woman:
(a) whether, and if so to what extent, it is compatible with the Holy Scriptures; and
(b) whether, and if so in what circumstances, it is permissible within the Church's teaching on chastity. (SC2006/1/031)
2. 'Cohabitation', as this report uses the term, is defined as a monogamous, exclusive relationship, stable over a period of years, and with the clear intent of permanence, but lacking the formal public nature signified by a ceremony in which promises are exchanged before witnesses, and the registration by the State.
3. In answer to point (a), in the Christian understanding of marriage, based on biblical teaching, marriage involves at least three characteristics – exclusive commitment, intended permanence and public declaration. Holy matrimony is protected by God's laws forbidding fornication and adultery and those regulating divorce. In marriage, a husband and wife are joined in a lifelong union of loving and self-giving service to one another, which points to the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church. Marriage is seen by the Church as promoting Christian godliness and stable family life, being for the good of society.
4. While cohabitation so defined may well differ significantly from a casual 'living together' relationship, and while at one level it could be treated as genuine marriage, it is incompatible with the ideals of Scripture for marriage. If the partners have not formally (if privately) vowed permanent fidelity, it is less than marriage. If they have made such a commitment, there seems to be every good reason to make that commitment public and so provide a proper encouragement to others to chastity and fidelity.
5. In answer to point (b) above, following the teaching of Scripture, the Church's understanding of sexual ethics involves 'chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage'. Cohabitation conforms to part of this teaching so long as there is exclusive faithfulness in the relationship. But, unless the relationship involves a public commitment to exclusivity and permanence, it cannot unambiguously witness to the standards expected by the Church.
6. In the view of the Doctrine Commission, cohabitation can be compatible with those ideals of Holy Scripture which call for exclusive fidelity and permanence, but may be incompatible with the ideal of Holy Scripture which calls for a public declaration of commitment to exclusivity and permanence. Under such circumstances, the parties may exercise a proper fidelity, although their actions, deliberately kept private rather than public, may raise questions to do with their 'chastity in singleness'. Some form of public

declaration, however, would remove any ambiguity that a cohabiting couple were not committed to faithfulness in marriage. The Doctrine Commission commends the Christian solemnization of marriage as the best form of this public commitment.

Doctrine Commission
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