

IN THE APPELLATE TRIBUNAL

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

IN THE MATTER OF questions referred by the Primate under section 63(1) of the Constitution

AND IN THE MATTER OF the *Blessing of Persons Married according to the Marriage Act 1961 Regulations 2019* of the Synod of Wangaratta.

Submission from Reverend Wayne Walters, Vicar of Christ Church Dingley

Introduction

This submission addresses some of the assertions made by the Primary Submissions of the Synod of the Diocese of Wangaratta under the headings of:

Blessing; Scripture and Doctrine

Summary of these submissions

1. That the Scriptural concept of Blessing is inextricably linked to the expectation and condition of obedience to God's commands. That which is prohibited by Scripture cannot be blessed without spiritual danger to those being blessed and the one doing the blessing.
2. That Scripture speaks plainly on this matter in contrast to the attempt of the Submission to claim otherwise.
3. That Doctrine cannot be separated from matters of Christian behaviour, given that in the matter of same sex activity, as in other areas of sin where persisted in – there are eternal implications for the salvation of the persons involved.

Blessing

Blessing in Scripture is prophetic – as in Jacob and Moses blessing the sons and tribes concerning their future; and impartational – conferring on them certain entitlements – as Jacob received from Isaac. It is also consequential – that which is promised to those who obey God's laws as distinct from those who disobey, who consequently come under a curse. Deuteronomy chps 27-30. One is life, one is death. The Aaronic blessing in Numbers is given as a set of words whose priestly use God promised to honour.

What is clear is that the act of blessing confers God's favour and the expectation of blessing is inextricably tied to obedience to God's commands. It is inconceivable and inconsistent with the biblical concept of blessing that blessing could be conferred on persons in the very context of committing sin. Dorothy Lee speaks of Jesus' blessing at the consummation of human history as for

all creation, having stated that is 'drawing into the centre those pushed to the outside'. She neglects to consider the scripture in Revelation 22 that those who are called blessed are those who have 'washed their robes' while the sexually immoral are among those excluded, who are 'outside the gates'. So a distinction is made in Scripture, not just here but throughout, of those who might be called blessed and those who are outside of God's specific blessing, on the basis of their choice to continue to live contrary to his law. This is a state that can change at any time through repentance and faith, through the grace of Jesus.

Paul also warns Timothy 1 Tim 5:22 to not be hasty to lay hands upon anyone and not to share in the sins of others. The context is the setting aside of people in leadership, or of imparting spiritual gifts, but the implications for blessing are clear, which is that we are not to affirm or imply approval of that which has the character of sin. This is to compromise the integrity of the gospel and to empty the blessing of its power. It becomes a ritual without substance and may even become a curse, when we consider the parallel of Paul's warning of those who receive communion in an unworthy manner that they are bringing 'judgment upon themselves'. (1 Cor 11:28-29)

Scripture

The above accepts the teaching of Article VII that '*...no Christian man [sic] whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commands which are called moral.*'

The Wangaratta submission is ingenuine in the slant it puts on the diversity of interpretation of Scripture. It concedes! that –'there is a body of opinion that would consider the blessing of same sex civil marriages contrary to Holy Scripture and therefore contrary to the faith of the Church...' Surely this is the understatement of the century!

It goes on to say that this is because 'certain biblical verses ... are interpreted by some scholars as prohibiting homosexual relationships.' '*Some scholars*' includes the weight of Christian tradition in history as well as current orthodoxy. The alternative view is the one that needs to establish how the consistent and clear teaching across the breadth of Scripture can be understood other than in its plain sense.

Much is made of 'different views' and 'disputed passages' and 'continuing debates among scholars', but in one sense that is simply what scholars do. Furthermore, Paul concedes that differences among the Corinthians may be necessary to show which of them have God's approval. (1 Cor 11:19) So it is no evidence that the Scripture is ambiguous - just that there are those who would like it to be.

The comparison with changed rulings on ordination of women due to different socio-cultural context is not applicable. There are scriptural precedents for women in roles of spiritual leadership in both Old and New Testaments as well as the teaching that in Christ there is no male or female. The same can be said of the parallels drawn by Dorothy Lee in relation to re-marriage of divorced persons or slavery – both issues which have biblical precedent and direct treatment that opens the door for a reconsideration of past acceptance or rejection by the church. Homosexual practice has no such balancing scripture to cast doubt upon its consistent prohibition in both Old and New Testaments. Speculations and suggestions about words and meanings do not alter the plain sense of what is actually spelt out in Romans 1:26-32 and explicit in the Old Testament (Lev 18:22, 20:13).

It may further be said that suggestions that changed times and culture require revision of scriptural prohibitions need to take into account the strong theme through the Scriptures not to learn the 'ways of the nations', nor to allow the world to 'squeeze you into its mould'. *'Friendship with the world is enmity with God'* James 4:4

The point of these verses and theme is that the spirit of the world is not to be identified as the Holy Spirit -quite the contrary, and the way we discern God's Spirit from that of the world is by Scripture and also by the fruit it produces.

Doctrine

Teaching about the faith includes that which is necessary for salvation. Similarly, those things that are taught as excluding one from salvation surely can be described as an aspect of doctrine. 1 Cor 6:9-10, Roms 1:26-32, Jude 7 are just a selection of texts characteristic of the warning of the eternal implications of persisting in homosexual acts.

It is not so easy to separate behaviour and discipline from doctrine. In 2Timothy 4:2-3 Paul exhorts Timothy to *'Preach the Word: ...correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with **sound doctrine**. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.'*

The teaching of the faith includes the right practice of the faith. It is purely academic to split the two.

And right practice is established from the consistent counsel of the Scriptures and from the inherited and tested tradition of the Church as to their interpretation.

Conclusion

I contend that the decision of the synod of the Diocese of Wangaratta to provide a form of blessing for civil marriages, which consequently includes same sex marriages, contravenes the doctrine and teaching of the Anglican Church.

This doctrine is steeped in the Scriptures.

Its teaching on blessing presumes and requires a posture of obedience to God's commands which same sex activity is in contradiction of.

I therefore call upon the Appellate Tribunal to answer No to Question 2