

St Stephen's Greythorn submission in reference to the Primate's referral to Appellate Tribunal

Our Interest

St Stephen's, Greythorn has a particular interest in the Reference to the Appellate Tribunal of "Blessing of Persons Married According to the Marriage Act 1961 Regulations 2019" as:

- We are part of the Anglican Church of Australia
- We desire clarity about teaching members of the congregation and especially youth and young adults about biblical sexuality
- We seek clarity on this issue as there has been conflict in the parish over what the Bible teaches on same-sex marriage and whether any homosexual practice is allowable by God
- We desire to teach and uphold what is in accordance with our Anglican formularies and Foundational Documents as set out in Scripture, the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) and the 39 Articles.

Introduction

We will argue that marriage is a doctrine, it is only between a man and a woman, and as outlined in scripture is the normative pattern for marriage.

We will go on to argue that as a consequence of this, same sex relationships cannot be blessed because it means that we would be approving something that God condemns.

Doctrine of Marriage

The Wangaratta submission argues that marriage is not a doctrine of faith but an issue of ritual, ceremonial and discipline. We argue differently for the following reasons:

First, it seems that the Australian and wider Anglican Church refers to marriage as a doctrine. For example in the foreword of *'Essays from the Doctrine Commission,'* the Chair of the Doctrine Commission, Bishop Jonathan Holland states that the purpose of the *'Essays'* is to explore the theological and scriptural issues of the 'doctrine of marriage'.

And when one reads through the *'Essays'* we see authors drawing upon quotes and resolutions of meetings the term 'doctrine of marriage' is used (e.g. Primates meeting in Canterbury 2016, 2005 Primate's Theological Commission that produced the St Michael's Report, 2014 House of Bishops.)

Historically, this shows that the thinking about marriage in the Anglican Church is that it is a doctrine rather than as a ritual or ceremony. The Diocese of Wangaratta is suggesting something that goes against the historical thinking of the Anglican Church when they argue that marriage is not a doctrine.

Second, the Wangaratta submission argues that the teaching on marriage in the BCP is not doctrine but teaching on ritual, ceremonial and discipline.

We argue that marriage as presented in the BCP is more than ritual, ceremonial, worship and discipline because it invokes scripture to teach us what marriage is. This fits the definition of doctrine as outline by the constitution in Section 74(1) which is defined as "the teaching of this church on any questions of faith". The BCP outlines the nature and purpose of marriage in scripture.

The marriage services in the BCP serves two purposes. First it authorises a marriage service and second it reminds, reinforces and re-teaches what marriage is. The BCP reminds us of the Biblical principles or what the doctrine of marriage is. This is briefly summarised as;

- It is a union between a man and woman
- For the procreation of children
- Appropriate expression of our sexual desires (i.e. avoid fornication)
- For help and comfort
- Lifelong voluntary and exclusive
- A sign of the relationship between Christ and the Church
- Grounded in creation
- Joined together and blessed by God

These are more than ritualistic or ceremonial practices. This is doctrine that is to be taught.

Our third argument is that the BCP shows us that these doctrinal principles of marriage are firmly grounded in scripture, and scripture forms the Fundamental Declarations of the Australian Anglican Church which our constitution states we must always be consistent with. The Wangaratta submission is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches about marriage and so is inconsistent with Fundamental Declarations.

Genesis 1 & 2 recounts God's creation of the world. It shows the order of relationships in creation between God, human beings and the created world, and declares it is good. In Gen 1 v 27 – 28 God creates male and female and commends them to be fruitful and multiply. In Gen 2 v 24 we find that a man shall leave his mother and father, shift his loyalty from them to his wife and the new family they will create. This is pattern of marriage that God has outlined. In Matt 19 some Pharisees come to test Jesus about reasons for divorce. Jesus draws upon both Genesis 1 v 27 and Genesis 2 v 24 for his answer. In other words the Creator of the world is drawing upon his normative pattern for marriage to answer the Pharisees' question. Jesus' answer teaches us that marriage is serious business. Marriage is a life-long, sexually exclusive relationship between a man and a woman.

The Wangaratta submission is at odds with that Jesus teaches and is inconsistent with the Fundamental Documents of the Australian Anglican Church.

However, the Wangaratta submission observes that the Wangaratta Diocese can make forms for a particular occasion and in this case there is "no authorised form for the occasion of persons in a civil marriage who seek a blessing". But the "authorised form" must be consistent with Fundamental Documents.

So our last objection is that a blessing of a civil same-sex relationship is inconsistent with scripture particularly Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 which clearly condemn same-sex intercourse.

Romans 1 explains that God gave men and woman over to shameful lusts. In v26 we read "Woman exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones." And in v 27 "In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men." This expression of sexuality (among other things) lent themselves to God's wrath, not blessing. It is outside God's normative pattern of marriage.

In 1 Cor 6 v 9 – 10 Paul gives a list of those who will not enter the kingdom of heaven. It includes the sexually immoral, idolaters, male prostitutes, practising homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers or swindlers. Paul reminds the Corinthians that is what some of them were and we too need the humility to recognise ourselves on this list. These are people who are not blessed by God, but rather stand outside the kingdom. They stand condemned for doing wrong.

Consequently a blessing of a civil same sex marriage is inconsistent with the Fundamental Documents because scripture shows that what is being blessed is something that God condemns.

Conclusion

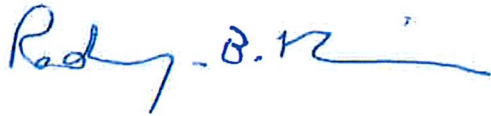
So in conclusion we reject the argument that is presented in Wangaratta's submission that marriage is not doctrine. It is clearly taught in scripture and affirmed by Jesus. This position is reinforced by the BCP and it is the historical position of the Anglican Church.

We argue that an authorised service for a blessing of a civil marriage cannot be used for blessing same sex marriages as same-sex intercourse is condemned in scripture. Scripture reveals that God does not bless these relationships but rather condemns them.

Consequently we believe a service that blesses same sex marriage is inconsistent with our Anglican formularies and Foundational Document, and request that no such service be permitted within the Anglican Church of Australia.

On behalf of the Parish Council of St Stephen's Greythorn

Reverend Rodney Morris, Senior Minister



12th December 2019

Dr Gus McLean, Church Warden



12th Dec 2019

Dr Dorothy Prentice, Church Warden



12/12/2019