

DOCTRINE COMMISSION

PURPOSE

The Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia exists to examine questions of doctrine referred to it by various church bodies, and to make recommendations on matters of doctrine which are of importance to the church.

MEMBERSHIP

Name	Qualifications
The Right Reverend Dr Jonathan Holland (Chair)	BA (Hons); MA; PhD
The Reverend Dr Matthew Anstey	BTh, MCS, PhD
The Reverend Dr Rhys Bezzant	BA (Hons), BTh, MTh, ThD.
The Reverend Canon Professor Dorothy Lee	BA (Hons), BD (Hons), Dip Ed, PhD
The Right Reverend Dr Stephen Pickard	BComm, BD, PhD.
The Reverend Dr Gregory Seach	BA (Hons), DipEd, BD (Hons), AdvDipMin, PhD
Dr Claire Smith	BTh, MA (Theol), PhD
The Right Reverend Dr Michael Stead (Secretary)	BCom, BD (Hons), DipMin, PhD
The Reverend Canon Dr Mark Thompson	BA, BTh, DipA, MTh, DPhil

The current panel of the Doctrine Commission was appointed in December 2017 by the Primate on the advice of the General Synod Standing Committee.

THE WORK OF THE DOCTRINE COMMISSION SINCE GENERAL SYNOD 2017

Since the last session of the General Synod, the Doctrine Commission has met in person three times: 13-14 February 2018, 5-7 November 2018 and 11-13 February 2019. Due to COVID-19, we did not meet face to face in 2020, and instead met via Zoom on 10 September 2020.

The work of the Doctrine Commission has been focussed on the following matters.

1. REFERRALS from GENERAL SYNOD 2017

a. GS57/17 The Gospel of Christ Crucified

The Doctrine Commission considered GS resolution 57/17 (a request to prepare a report on the distinction between the Gospel of Christ crucified and the consequences of that gospel) at its February 2018 meeting. We prepared a short response, which is attached as Attachment 1.

b. GS48/17 – Marriage and Same-sex Marriage

The major item for the Doctrine Commission in 2018 and 2019 was preparation of a collection of essays exploring the doctrinal, historical, biblical, theological, ecclesial and hermeneutical issues arising in relation to same-sex marriage. This was in response to the 2017 General Synod Resolution 48/17.

GS48/17 – 3-8 September 2017

Marriage, same-sex marriage and the blessing of same-sex relationships.

To facilitate a respectful conversation in our church by means of a collection of essays on marriage and same-sex relationships that explores Scriptural and theological issues relating to:

- a. The doctrine of marriage expressed in the formularies of the Anglican Church of Australia
- b. Our current Australian context, exploring the relationship between the State's definition of marriage and the church's doctrine of marriage
- c. Key Old Testament and New Testament texts on sex, marriage and friendship
- d. Scripture and hermeneutics
- e. A theology of blessing
- f. A theology of desire
- g. Godly disagreement on this issue
- h. The case for and against same-sex marriage and/or the blessing of same sex unions

At its February 2018 meeting the Doctrine Commission worked out an outline of chapters and writers. It was decided not to deviate too much from the criteria determined by General Synod, otherwise the collection of essays would balloon out. Furthermore, it was decided to seek contributions from others outside the Doctrine Commission, not only to spread the load of writing, but more importantly to ensure gender balance.

Draft chapters were shared by email, before a November meeting of the Commission. Each chapter was considered in turn, chapters and feedback offered to each writer for any further editorial work or late changes before the collection was finalised for consideration by the bishops (at their request) prior to publication.

In March 2019 the collection of essays was shown to the bishops at their annual Bishops Meeting in Perth and some helpful comments received and incorporated. The collection of essays was further considered at the May 2019 meeting of Standing Committee and then approved for publication.

The book – *Marriage, Same-Sex Marriage and the Anglican Church of Australia: essays from the Doctrine Commission*, Broughton Publishing, Mulgrave, Victoria, 2019 – is divided into four areas: context; scripture; history, theology and ecclesiology; and the case for and against.

Doctrine Commission members hold differing views on same sex marriage, and the differing views are reflected in the various chapters.

The book was distributed to members of General Synod and is available electronically on the General Synod website.

While aware of the book's limitations – for example, the Doctrine Commission was not asked to look at pastoral or liturgical issues nor highlight the 'lived experience' of same-sex couples – nevertheless, members hope it will contribute towards the 2017 General Synod's wish for a 'respectful conversation' on same-sex issues at General Synod in May 2022.

2. CHURCH LAW COMMISSION CORRESPONDENCE

In May 2018 Standing Committee asked the Church Law Commission 'in consultation with the Doctrine Commission' to provide advice about the legal implications of same-sex marriage for Anglican clergy.

An initial letter from the Doctrine Commission to the Law Commission in February 2018 generated a response in September seeking clarification around the use of the word 'doctrine'. Was the Church's teaching on marriage a 'doctrine' as defined in the Constitution: that is, a 'teaching of this Church on a question of faith'? After some debate at its Nov 2018 meeting the Doctrine Commission replied in December 2018 indicating that it was an unfinished conversation. In Feb 2019 the Doctrine Commission was able to furnish a fuller reply indicating that there was no unanimity in answering the two questions put to it by the Law Commission.

The Standing Committee referral and subsequent correspondence between the Law Commission and the Doctrine Commission can be found at **Attachment 2**.

3. ANGLICAN-LUTHERAN DIALOGUE: 'Perspectives on Mission'

In November 2018 Standing Committee asked the Doctrine Commission to look at the Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue Concluding Task Report, July 2018, on '*Perspectives on Mission: An Addendum to Common Ground*' seeking confirmation that it conforms to the doctrine of this Church and giving any feedback or proposed amendments.

The Doctrine Commission looked briefly at '*Perspectives in Mission*' at its February 2019 meeting, but felt it needed more time to consider the document. We were then in the midst of finalising the collection of essays on marriage and same-sex marriage and there was little energy left to deal with this ecumenical matter.

Due to COVID-19, our planned meeting for 2020 did not occur. Instead, we met via Zoom on 10 September 2020 to consider this matter. Our report was provided to the November 2020 meeting of the Standing Committee, and can be found at **Attachment 3**.

ATTACHMENT 1



The Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia

A report from the Doctrine Commission on the Gospel and the Consequences of the Gospel

This report has been prepared in response to the September 2017 General Synod resolution 57/16 *'to prepare a report on the distinction between the gospel of Christ crucified and the consequences of that gospel'*.

THE GOSPEL AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE GOSPEL

1. The gospel of God is the gospel concerning God's Son and so the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Rom 1.1, 3, 16). In the coming of Jesus, the kingdom of God has drawn near (Mark 1.14-15).
2. The content of the gospel is inextricable from its context and the consequences which necessarily follow from it (1 Cor 15.3ff.).
3. At the centre of the gospel is the grace and gift of the triune God in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ – his incarnation, perfect life, atoning death, triumphant resurrection, glorious ascension and promised return.
4. The context of the gospel, within which it is properly understood, includes creation, the history of Israel, the messianic prophecies, and the various images of salvation in the Old Testament.
5. The consequences of the gospel, which are inseparably bound up with the gospel itself, include the formation of a new humanity in Christ, love and compassion for every human being, the pursuit of social justice, and a particular concern for the needy and vulnerable.
6. The value of distinguishing (though not separating) the content and the consequences of the gospel lies in the clarity it brings to the message of salvation the church proclaims to a fallen, broken and hurting world.
7. The danger in separating the content and the consequences of the gospel lies in failing to recognise that the gospel impacts the whole of life personally, corporately, and socially and, no less, the whole creation.

Bishop Jonathan Holland
Chair, General Synod Doctrine Commission
14 Feb 2018

ATTACHMENT 2**SC2017/04/38 – 8-9 December 2017**

The Standing Committee

1. received this report;
2. requested the Church Law Commission, in consultation with the Doctrine Commission, to provide advice with respect to the implications of the Marriage Amendment (Definitions and Religious Freedoms) Act 2017, including whether there are legal impediments to Anglican Clergy:
 - a. solemnizing the marriage of a same-sex couple;
 - b. blessing the marriage of a same-sex couple; or
 - c. purporting to solemnise the marriage of a man and a woman, without holding a marriage celebrant's licence; or
 - d. purporting to solemnise marriage of a man and a woman, who have already been married under Commonwealth Law;
3. requested the Church Law Commission, to consider whether a member of the clergy who enters into a civil marriage with a person of the same sex is acting contrary to the law and/or discipline of this church.



The Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia

14 February 2018

Justice Debra Mullins
Chair, Church Law Commission
Be email: Justice.Mullins@courts.qld.gov.au

Dear Debra

The Doctrine Commission met in Melbourne this week and considered reference SC2017/04/38 from the Standing Committee.

As you will be aware, this motion asks the Church Law Commission “in consultation with the Doctrine Commission” to provide advice about the legal implications of same-sex marriage for Anglican clergy.

In our view, the substantive questions raised by the motion address legal matters which properly belong within the ambit of the Church Law Commission, and are outside the expertise of the Doctrine Commission. We consider that the Church Law Commission is unlikely to require our assistance to define our Church's doctrine of marriage, which was accurately summarised by the Primate in his Presidential Address to the 17th General Synod that

“marriage is between a man and a woman, under God, forsaking all others, until death parts them”. The Doctrine Commission is very willing to consult with the Church Law Commission if there are any specific questions in relation to our Church’s doctrine of marriage that the Commission would like to put to us.

Yours sincerely

Bishop Jonathan Holland
Chair, General Synod Doctrine Commission
14 Feb 2018

Memorandum

To: Chair Doctrine Commission
From: Chair, Church Law Commission
Subject: Church’s teaching on marriage
Date: 21 September 2018

Dear Bishop

As you know, the Church Law Commission has been asked by the Standing Committee for advice in relation to certain legal questions concerning persons of the same sex married under the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth).

You have written to the Church Law Commission:

In our view, the substantive questions raised by the motion address legal matters which properly belong within the ambit of the Church Law Commission, and are outside the expertise of the Doctrine Commission. We consider that the Church Law Commission is unlikely to require our assistance to define our Church’s doctrine of marriage, which was accurately summarised by the Primate in his Presidential Address to the 17th General Synod, that “marriage is between a man and a woman, under God, forsaking all others, until death parts them”. The Doctrine Commission is very willing to consult with the Church Law Commission if there are any specific questions in relation to our Church’s doctrine of marriage that the Commission would like to put to us.

The Church Law Commission met on 8 September 2018, and does have specific questions in relation to our doctrine of marriage. Those questions are:

1. Does the proposition that “marriage is between a man and a woman, under God, forsaking all others, until death parts them” constitute the teaching of this Church on a question of faith?
2. Does the proposition that the marriage under the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) of two people of the same sex cannot be blessed by a minister of the Anglican Church of Australia constitute the teaching of this Church on a question of faith?

These questions have arisen because it is not clear to the Church Law Commission whether what the Doctrine Commission has stated as being the doctrine of the church is “doctrine” as that term is defined in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Section 74(1) of the Constitution defines “doctrine” to mean “the teaching of this Church on any question of faith”.

As a matter of statutory interpretation, it is necessary to give weight to each word. Therefore, “doctrine” must mean not just the teaching of this Church, nor the teaching of this Church on any question, but the teaching of this Church on a question that is a question of faith. The definition of “faith” in section 74(1) of the Constitution is merely “includes the obligation to hold faith”.

It seems to the members of the Church Law Commission that there may well be teaching of this Church on matters that are not questions of faith; and, indeed, if there was no such teaching then the words “on a question of faith” would be otiose, since all the teachings of the church would be necessarily teachings on questions of faith.

In other words, it seems to the members of the Church Law Commission that the concept of doctrine necessarily distinguishes between all teaching of this Church and that portion of that teaching that is on questions of faith.

That in turn raises the question whether the teaching of this Church on what constitutes marriage is teaching on a question of faith. This is of critical importance, because the legal conclusions and consequences insofar as they relate to doctrine will relate to doctrine as it is defined in the Constitution.

We consider that it is wholly in the domain of the Doctrine Commission to identify what are questions of faith for the purposes of the Constitution. We note that sections 1 and 2 of the Constitution refer specifically to the Christian Faith and to “the ultimate rule and standard of faith”. Section 3 of the Constitution refers to the Church obeying “the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline...”.

Section 4 provides that this Church “retains and approves the doctrine and principles” of the Church of England in the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-nine Articles, and declares that they are “to be regarded as the authorized standard of worship and doctrine”. Section 74(3) provides that in this Constitution ‘the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in the Book of Common Prayer and the “articles of religion” sometimes called the “Thirty-nine Articles” means the body of such doctrine and principles.’ We are unable to suggest how this sub-section assists in interpreting the Constitution. For completeness, although it does not appear to be helpful, section 74(3) of the Constitution provides that in the Constitution “unless the context or subject matter otherwise indicates, any reference to faith shall extend to doctrine”.

All this suggested to the members of the Church Law Commission that while (for example) the creeds of the church clearly constituted the teaching of the church on questions of faith, it was possible that some things contained in or derived from the Book of Common Prayer did not. Reference was made to the requirement that “yearly at Easter every Parishioner shall reckon with the Parson, Vicar, or Curate, or his or their Deputy or Deputies; and pay to them or him all Ecclesiastical Duties accustomed due, then and at that time to be paid” as possibly not the teaching of the church on a question of faith. A similar question was raised regarding the statement in Article XXXVII that the Laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death, for heinous and grievous offences.

As already noted, it is outside the expertise and domain of the Church Law Commission to determine what questions are “of faith” and are not of faith, which is why we have asked the questions that we have.

If it would assist your Commission, two or three members of the Church Law Commission would be prepared to meet with some members of the Doctrine Commission in order to talk through these questions further.



*The Doctrine Commission
of the Anglican Church of Australia*

4 December 2018

Justice Debra Mullins
Chair, Church Law Commission
By email: justice.mullins@courts.qld.gov.au

Dear Debra,

Thank you for your letter (20 September 2018) on behalf of the Church Law Commission asking two questions of the Doctrine Commission, namely:

- does the proposition that 'marriage is between a man and a woman under God, forsaking all others, until death parts them' constitute the teaching of this Church on a question of faith?
- does the proposition that the marriage under the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) of two people of the same sex cannot be blessed by a minister of the Anglican Church of Australia constitute the teaching of this Church on a question of faith?

The members of the Doctrine Commission considered these questions at their 5-7 November meeting in Sydney. We were not able to come to a common mind and at the moment our conversation is unfinished.

There are hopes to continue the conversation by teleconference before Christmas after which we may be better able to give our opinion on the answers to your questions.

I will let you know of any progress we make.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan

The Right Reverend Dr Jonathan Holland

*Chair,
General Synod Doctrine Commission*

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The Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia

20 February 2019

Justice Debra Mullins
Chair, Church law Commission
By email: Justice.Mullins@courts.qld.gov.au

Dear Debra

The Doctrine Commission met recently, and considered the two questions that the Church law Commission put to us in its letter dated 20 September 2018. Those questions are:

1. Does the proposition that "marriage is between a man and a woman, under God, forsaking all others, until death parts them" constitute the teaching of this Church on a question of faith?
2. Does the proposition that the marriage under the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) of two people of the same sex cannot be blessed by a minister of the Anglican Church of Australia constitute the teaching of this Church on a question of faith?

Question 1

Question 1 as worded in effect asks the Doctrine Commission for its interpretation of the meaning of "faith" in section 74(1) of the Constitution. We believe that this is a matter best left to the Church law Commission.

Rather than answer the question asked, we offer our advice about the source and status of the doctrine of marriage, which (we hope) will be sufficient for the Church law Commission to answer the question.

The Doctrine Commission is of the view that the current doctrine of our church is that marriage is a union between one man and one woman. This is a "doctrine" in the sense in which that word is used in section 4 of the Constitution - it is a "principle of doctrine" that is contained within the Book of Common Prayer (in particular, in the Form of Solemnization of Holy Matrimony), and thereby a doctrine that has been "retained" by this Church. The explanation as to why the man/woman nature of marriage is a "principle of doctrine", and not merely a "practice" of BCP is contained in the first attachment to this letter, entitled "The Doctrine of Marriage of the Anglican Church of Australia".

The Doctrine Commission is unsure whether this conclusion about our Church's doctrine of marriage means that it is a matter of "faith" for the purposes of the Constitution. Is the meaning of "faith" in the Constitution limited to doctrines that arise from the Fundamental Declarations, or does it also include doctrines that arise from the Ruling Principles? This is a question of legal interpretation that is beyond the competence of the Doctrine Commission.

The Doctrine Commission is not of a common mind as to whether the man/woman nature of marriage is a doctrine that arises from the Fundamental Declarations. Some members of the Doctrine Commission believe that marriage as the union of one man and one woman is a doctrine that arises from the "commands", "doctrine" and "discipline" of Christ, and is part of the "rule and standard of faith" established by "the canonical scriptures". Other members believe that this doctrine of marriage is not established by the teaching of Christ or the canonical Scriptures.

In short, then, if the word "faith" in the Constitution means the doctrines established by both the Fundamental Declarations (sections 1-3) and the Ruling Principles (sections 4-6), then marriage as the union of a man and a woman is "the teaching of this Church on a question of faith". But if "faith" in the Constitution is limited the doctrines established by the Fundamental Declarations, then we are not of a common mind.

Question 2

The Doctrine Commission is not of a common mind as to whether the Church's doctrine of marriage has the implication that a minister of the Anglican Church of Australia cannot bless a civil same-sex marriage.

The question turns, in part, on the interpretation of the following clause in the BCP marriage service.

... so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful.

Some members of the Commission take the view that the effect of this clause is to "cover the field" with respect to marriage, such that it is only "Matrimony" (as that term is understood in BCP) that joins couples together in God's sight, and that all other forms of "coupling" are invalid.

Other members of the Commission take the view that "God's word doth allow" other forms of human coupling, and that this clause does not prohibit (say) the blessing of same-sex relationships, because it refers to the validity of heterosexual marriages. On this view, it would be possible to amend the canons of our church to create a new service for the blessing of a same-sex relationship. The second attachment to this letter, entitled "A response - An alternative reading of BCP" articulates this view.

In view of the uncertainty on this question, it may be prudent to advise clergy/ministers to refrain from blessing same-sex marriage until this has been clarified.

Yours sincerely,

Bishop Jonathan Holland
Chair, Doctrine Commission

ATTACHMENT 3



The Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia

10 September 2020

Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue – Perspectives on Mission: An Addendum to Common Ground Response to Standing Committee Resolution 2018/03/67

1. At the meeting of Standing Committee on 9-10 November 2018, resolution SC2018/03/67 received the document 'Perspectives in Mission' prepared by the Anglican Lutheran Dialogue Group as a proposed addendum to '*Common Ground: Covenanting for Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation between The Anglican Church of Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia*' and

“referred ‘Perspectives in Mission’ to the Doctrine Commission seeking confirmation that it conforms to the Doctrine of this Church and any feedback or proposed amendments the Doctrine Commission recommends”

2. The Doctrine Commission briefly considered 'Perspectives in Mission' when it met in February 2019, but advised that it needed more time to consider the document. The planned face-to-face meeting of the Doctrine Commission in 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19. The Doctrine Commission met to consider this matter via video conference on 10 September.
3. The Doctrine Commission advises that 'Perspectives in Mission' conforms to the doctrine of this Church, and that is suitable for the purpose for which it is intended – that is, as a third appendix to 'Common Ground'. Had the Doctrine Commission drafted such a document *de novo*, it would have expressed matters differently at various points, but the Commission recognized that it was not being asked to rewrite a document that has been jointly drafted by representatives of the Anglican and Lutheran Churches.
4. If there is opportunity to edit the document, we recommend the insertion of the sentence highlighted below to clarify the meaning of para 8.6.

8.6 The Anglican Church has identified *diakonia* as a key missional sphere and mode of ministry for the whole people of God, with specific training, deployment and support. **In the Anglican Church, this ministry is embodied in the order of deacons.** Deacons minister in a sphere which bridges the gap between the church and the wider community, between liturgy and outreach. The role of deacons therefore provides special opportunity for witness, acts of mercy, ecumenical cooperation and the furthering of God's mission to the world.

5. The Doctrine Commission also recommends that the document be given a careful proof reading. Some of the issues/typos identified are as follows.

Para 3.2 “resurrection”	should be	“resurrection”
Para 4.3 “the Spirit, that is”	should be	“the Spirit, which is”
para 6.1 “, that brings”	should be	“, which brings ...”
para 8.3 “auxillary offices”	should be	“auxiliary offices”
Para 8.6 “a sphere which”	should be	“a sphere that”
Para 9.2 “This group is met with joys and challenges”	is an awkward phrase	
Para 10.1 “God’s grace,”	should be	“God’s grace” (omit comma)
Para 11.2 “consideration”	should be	“consideration”
Para 12.1 “opportunites”	should be	“opportunities”

There was also inconsistency in biblical references, which is usually set out in full, but sometimes abbreviated (e.g., in footnote 10 and footnote 13).

Yours sincerely

Bishop Jonathon Holland
Chair, General Synod Doctrine Commission