

Unlike governments, our Anglican liturgies echo Scripture and proclaim that *'Marriage is a Gift of God.'* A gift is determined and offered by its giver, *not* its recipients. If marriage is God's gift and reflects the relationship between Christ and His Church, how can we change its definition without distorting the intentions *God* has for it? Surely, the proposed motion to amend Canon 21 exceeds the limits of *human* authority. To claim the *'right'* to marry denies God's generosity as the *Author* of marriage [Mt 20:1-16]; a *'just'* gift is as much an oxymoron as *'obligatory'* grace.

Civil unions governed by the state are *not* the same as *Christian* marriages. The latter possess *some* of the attributes and benefits the former confer but presuppose *Spiritual* bases and blessings *beyond* them. Foremost, *officiating clergy* are servants of God and the Church, *not* mere executors of civil rulings; the matrimony *they* petition from God is far more than any state can grant!

While civil laws are enacted by democratic vote, historically God's teachings, which church doctrines seek to apply, have been *discerned* comprehensively from Scripture, not *decided* ad hoc by popular ballot. Sadly, mass momentum has often led God's people astray: such as the Israelites' choice to craft a golden calf, their mob-ruling to grumble against Moses and Aaron, the spies' consensus *not* to enter the promised land and the disciples' insistence that Jesus shouldn't go to Jerusalem.

Jesus challenged traditional attitudes toward anger, lust, oaths, retaliation, hatred, almsgiving, prayer, fasting, acquisition, priorities, worry, judgment and the treatment of women; but, He upheld the Scriptural form of marriage. Quite readily, Jesus *could* have validated His surrounding culture (in which male-to-male congress was a well-established and 'institutionalized' practice within the Greco-Roman academy) and opposed religious tradition by advancing committed, monogamous, same-sex relationships; yet He *didn't*. Would He have refrained, if they were truly good gifts [Mt 7:9-11; Lk 11:11-13]?

Scripture doesn't teach Christians to define themselves by sex, race, status, abilities, accomplishments or preferences; it tells us our identity rests in the image we bore at creation, that of the Triune God, and in our re-creation in Christ. To speak in terms of *heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals* or *pansexuals* is not Biblical. *If* we insist that God *creates* these different types of people, are we *also* prepared to say He *makes* others idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, thieves, gluttons, drunkards or revilers [1 Cor 6:9-11]?

Moreover, concepts like *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* were coined relatively recently. Thus, the Bible doesn't speak in these categories, either; it *simply* addresses sexual *acts* that were common in the Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures: such as the 'knowing' of husband and wife, adultery (marital unfaithfulness), fornication (any sexual intercourse outside marriage) and homosexual sex; as well as other practices like cult prostitution, incest (sex with close relatives), gang rape and bestiality (sex with animals). It forbids *all but the first* of these as *sinful* pursuits.

Some advocates for the motion reject *Old* Testament laws entirely, claiming they're obsolete; yet Anglicans have commended a *different* approach since 1563, when Archbishop Matthew Parker revised Article VII of the Thirty-Nine Articles. There he proclaimed that the Old Testament is *not* contrary to the New. Neither are Christians bound by the *ceremonies* and *rites* of the Mosaic Law [Mk 7:14-23; Acts 10:19-27; 15:5-11, 22-29; Gal 5:1-12; He 10:1-10], nor by its *civil* precepts [Jn 8:3-11]; however, Christians are *not free* from the obedience expected by its *moral* commandments.

Jesus, of course, summed up this last category in the two great commands to love—God and neighbour, both of which came through the Mosaic Law. However, *that* love is *not* our 21st century North American variety! *His* love is self-sacrificing for the sake of others. *His'* love encourages what *He affirms*, but it never hesitates to prohibit what in His perfect purity He *cannot*. Yes, Jesus' attitude toward people is always, 'Yes!'; but frequently, His love compels Him to say, 'No' to many of our behaviours.

Consistent with His mission '*not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them*' [Mt 5:17-19], Jesus cites the Old Testament's *one* prescribed context for sexual intercourse [Gen 1:27; 2:24] as God-ordained marriage (between a man and a woman), which He outlines and extols [Mk 10:6-9].

We can *only* claim Jesus didn't denounce homosexual sex if we ignore His teaching in Mt 15:19 and Mk 7:21. In both passages, He neither singles it out nor seeks to dissuade its practisers *uniquely*; rather, He identifies various, evil proclivities that emerge from the human heart and defile a person, *including porneiai* – *every* kind of unlawful sex, which includes homosexual forms. Though, no doubt, Jesus *does* rejoice in many dimensions of faithful, same-sex relationships, homosexual sex cannot be one of them.

Indeed, as Christians we're called to offer *every* trait and inclination we possess to God, so that He might instruct us to use *all* His gifts in ways that are holy. *No* one's desires are entirely pure and untainted by sin [Rom 3:23]. We *all* must control our mental, emotional, spiritual and bodily appetites—*including sexual urges*. How could we practise or promote *any* act that God forbids without sinning against Him?

Without a doubt, this question applies as *much* to our personal deportment and conduct, at Synod *or elsewhere*, as it does to a motion with implications for sex!

May God grant us grace for approaching and examining *both*.

Respectfully submitted,

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