

[Paper delivered by Rt Rev Dr Tim Harris, Assistant Bishop of Adelaide, Australia  
Friday 16 August 2013 at Tough Questions Today: Exploring Theology of Marriage, Theology  
House Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand]

### **Explorations in a Theology of Marriage – International Perspectives**

Let me start by clarifying what I understand to be my role in this conference. I am not here to advocate any particular position or argue a case, but to contribute some broader background information that may help focus or locate your considerations. This is not an isolated discussion, and you are certainly not alone in exploring such questions. There is much to be learned from the experiences and studies of others, both positively and negatively.

I have also been asked to be a listener throughout this conference, and as it concludes I have been invited to contribute some observations and reflections on what I have heard.

My task in this initial address is to locate this particular discussion within a wider backdrop that extends around the globe, and across the ages. What I intend to offer is necessarily selective and amounts to the equivalent of a pencil sketch of sweeping landscape. I am also mindful that I am not speaking to an academic audience, so I hope to avoid in-house theological jargon which otherwise serves as short-hand. In preparing this address I became acutely aware that at every point more could be said and deserves elaboration, but I have sought to be disciplined. The danger in such a talk is to try and say too much, so I will try to avoid the temptation of elaboration and stay with brief coverage of the bigger picture.

#### **Attitudes we bring: the experience of ‘structured conversations’**

A common reflection on the part of those taking part in ‘structured conversations’ of this nature is that genuine dialogue or conversation is much harder than we assume. There can be frustrations in finding safe space to express our own thoughts and convictions. Even more challenging, there is often not a lot of listening going on.

Mindful of the experience of many such conversations, I offer the following three suggestions in terms of the attitudes needed for healthy conversations:

1. Whichever side of things we identify with, we should never assume we have learned all there is to know or be said on any particular issue. There is always more to be discovered, and we can gain a better understanding through the contributions and insights of others. We need to be open to fresh insights or being reminded of forgotten aspects.
2. There are two types of statements in such conversations: those that shut down any response or alternative viewpoint, and those that invite further discussion. It helps to consciously adopt the latter and provide space for other contributions and perspectives.
3. ‘Active listening’ is also especially important – the process of checking we have heard and understood someone correctly, before jumping in with our response. Taking care to hear what others are seeking to say—and hearing it at its strongest point, not its weakest—makes for a more fruitful experience of conversation.

We have many images of Jesus engaged in conversation in the Gospels. He was not someone to yell at someone from the other side of the street, but someone who would cross the street, seek out the most unlikely conversation partners, and more often than not accept hospitality and dialogue around the meal table with less than socially respectable company.

#### **Recognising our conversation partners**

An east-African greeting in effect says ‘I see you’. We need to recognise our conversation partners in the deeper sense of recognition, and also in a number of directions. We are

conversing as national churches seeking to find a common mind; we are conversing around the Anglican Communion as we seek to affirm a widespread consensus on foundational matters of belief that guide praxis; we are conversing with other churches as part of our ecumenical dialogues wanting to give expression to being part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of God united in Christ; we also owe it to our wider communities to speak clearly as to what we believe and practice with regard to marriage, together with explanation as to how we come to such views, and why.

Yet our conversation partners are wider than this: they cross the ages and spheres of existence. We are in the company of 'then faithful who rest in him, with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven' (ANZPB, Great Thanksgiving). They continue to speak across the ages, and witness our present discussions. We need to recognise such company, and wonder at their response: would they be saying 'why didn't we think of that?' or perhaps 'what were you thinking?!'

Even more profoundly, we need to recognise God as our ultimate conversation partner. God is not silent, nor left us to make educated guesses or shape things around personal opinion or popularity polls in such issues. We are to be guided and instructed, formed and transformed in all matters that lead to fullness of life. Any conversation that leaves God out of the discussion will be an exercise in futility.

How does God speak into such conversations? The many and diverse ways God has spoken are reflected in Scripture, and pre-eminently through the Word, his Son Jesus Christ, and through the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

It is sometimes said we have three avenues to discern the truths of God: Scripture, Tradition and Reason—misleadingly depicted as three legs of one stool. This is not how the three dimensions to knowledge and theological belief were originally described, where tradition and reason serve to shed light on our understanding and use of Scripture. In graphic terms, it is not like having a TV remote control selecting which of three channels we prefer, but more akin to having one screen in Scripture, viewed from the vantage point of both historic traditions of belief and the application of reason.

A significant Anglican contribution and resource in this area is found in the book edited by Philip Groves, *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality: A resource to enable listening and dialogue* (SPCK, 2008). A careful range of perspectives is brought together, representing something of the global and cultural diversity that makes up the Anglican Communion.

### **Identifying myself**

As noted above, it is not my place here to advocate any particular position, but to outline a range of perspectives, experiences and practices further afield. I am to listen, and offer some reflections at the conclusion. I have no wish to distract from that. However, I do not pretend to be without convictions or unwilling to own my own views. In brief:

1. I affirm the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution 1:10—understood as a whole, and as subsequently reaffirmed by a range of Anglican Communion 'Instruments'. I do so not out of duty, but out of conviction. I believe all that it says is right and important. In my opinion, it has served the Church well, and continues to do so.

2. I take the Lambeth 1:10 statement to be the mind of the Communion, and the onus lies with others who want to see a change from this position to argue a case. While I have read and heard a range of views calling for a revision of this position, I find myself in the 'yet to be persuaded' that Scripture allows us to change our understanding of marriage—but I am genuinely open to dialogue and conversation about such matters.

### **Differing approaches**

The main thing to note here is that some approach such discussions as *constructionists*, on the basis that marriage is a *social construct*, and society may choose to redefine or reconfigure marriage if that is a majority position. Alternatively, others may approach things as *essentialists*. In this, marriage is considered a 'given', understood as defined around some

essential characteristics which cannot be changed without creating something that is other from marriage, especially if identified with creational design and purpose.

### **Some key definitions and notions**

Without going into great detail, there are a couple of key definitions that feature in such discussions:

1. Chastity: this applies to all people, regardless of their marital status. It refers to living a chaste life, that is, restricting sexual conduct to the context of marriage. A married person may be chaste in not engaging in extra-marital relations, while a single person may abstain due to not being married.
2. Celibacy: this refers to a particular gift or 'charisma'. It is a personal vocation, sometimes for life, from which sexual relations are excluded.
3. Abstinence: this involves doing without sexual relations for a range of possible reasons – for a period by mutual consent between a married couple, to a single person not being in a marriage relationship.

### **Church and society: changing and diverse contexts**

We need to recognise the changing cultural, social and political contexts in which we find ourselves as a church. Issues of sexual lifestyle and same-sex marriage are the most prominent examples of a deeper change in relationship. For many centuries, the Church has occupied a privileged and high status place in western society, and especially the United Kingdom. Church and society shared essentially one and the same worldview, under the Christian God. Issues of social order and norms of acceptable behaviour were determined with reference to Judeo-Christian beliefs and values.

That is no longer the case. Even during the colonial era, while the Church of England was not formally the established Church, it still carried a voice of some authority. For all its opportunities and imperial baggage, the Church of England in the colonies was the empire church, and spoke as such. We now live in a post-colonial era, and in an avowedly secular and multi-faith society. The church has one voice among many, and cannot assume that the way the church frames and explores such issues will carry much influence or respect more broadly.

We need to recognise the enormous significance of this. In effect, two quite different conversations are underway, starting from profoundly different assumptions and worldviews. Given these differences, such conversations will very often reach quite different conclusions – *and conclusions which are internally consistent and coherent given the differing starting points and worldviews.*

Let me illustrate. The Lord's Prayer gives profound expression to a kingdom of God worldview that shapes where we go with day to day considerations. We seek an understanding that follows 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. When we have a conversation with someone for whom that is their heart prayer, we are on the same page. We share the same gospel worldview, and we can engage on that basis.

Yet, for an increasing majority of our wider community, this prayer does not speak for them. Either they express another Faith, or no faith. Their worldview is shaped and located elsewhere, and it may reflect more the basis of independence and secular construction of social realities.

Our task as a Church is to affirm the Lord's Prayer as the worldview and commitment that shapes our personal integrity and the common life of our Church. This will be our reference point in approaching a conference such as this.

We also need to be adept in explaining ourselves to a wider community, not only in terms of our conclusions and positions on such matters but also in arguing a case which does not

assume a shared convictional worldview, but argued on the basis of common good and the good order of society.

However, the Lord's Prayer also frames our approach to exploring such issues in-house, so to speak, within the community of faith of our Church. We need to be clear that we do so entirely on the basis of the worldview that the Lord's Prayer represents, not on the basis of a secular worldview that shapes the wider community debate or conclusions.

This is one issue among many likely social and ethical touch points. In the days and years ahead, as we live in an increasingly post-Christendom world, we will need the courage to articulate and live in a counter-cultural mode, where our convictional worldview will lead in other directions to the cultural flow of our wider society.

This last point also highlights another profound social and cultural change that is very real among us: sexual relationships and behaviour have now become quite detached from the context of marriage, and sexual experience and development is undertaken independently of the boundaries of engagement and marriage. This has been thoroughly normalised in general expectations, and to a large extent facilitated by the advent of effective contraception over the past fifty years. One of the key rationales for marriage—the provision of an ordered social unit for the inevitable birth of children—has weakened significantly, for the inevitability of childbirth is no-longer as inevitable (doubly enhanced by the ready availability of abortion).

In short, we explore these issues in a very different social and cultural place compared to our parents and their parents, and we need to be aware of and wise to such changes, without jettisoning our Christian worldview as the basis for our own considerations as a Church worthy of the name of God.

### **Review of task groups, reports and contributions**

There have been a number of extensive investigations by various national churches around the Anglican Communion relating to human sexuality. While these go back some three decades, the focus has been on human sexuality and same-sex sexual behaviour in particular. The question of marriage is frequently part of such discussions, but it is only recently that it is receiving more detailed treatment. Providing a wide review of all such reports is well beyond the scope of this talk, so I have limited myself to exploring more specifically where the question of marriage has been addressed or set aside as a separate issue. In other words, consideration of same-sex unions or partnerships does not necessarily entail construing it as one and the same as heterosexual marriage.

This is very much the approach in the Anglican Church of Australia to this point. The main resource produced by the Doctrine Panel of General Synod (FiF, 2001) had ten contributors, eight of whom expressed positions favourable to same sex relationships. One advocate, Peter Carnley (then Archbishop of Perth) contributed a chapter on 'Friendship'. His position was clear:

While it has been fashionable in the secular world to speak of long term committed relationships between people of the same gender as a form of 'marriage', it would be much more amendable and helpful from a Christian point of view to categorise such relationships by resorting to the concept of friendship. (FiF, 127)

The annual Australian Bishops' Conference this past year set aside most of the conference to explore questions of same-sex relationships and conduct, but it was clear from the outset that any consideration of redefining or extending marriage was off the table.

Without seeking to provide a narrative around a variety of reports and projects, let me provide some general patterns.

Discussions have almost invariably revolved around two approaches and conclusions, generally designated as historical/traditional views, and liberal/revisionist views. In most cases where this has been represented in the composition of working groups, the outcome has been lack of group consensus or agreement and dual presentation reports to be considered side by side (see notably SSR 2010; and most recently CoS TCSSR&M 2013).

### *Historical/traditional perspectives.*

With a high degree of consistency, the historical/traditional view is expressed using two dimensions, and one theological 'tap root'. The two dimensions are a biblical creational understanding of marriage as the union of a male and female, accompanied by a biblical theology of marriage that traverses the variety of practices evident in the Old Testament (including polygamous marriage, maidservants and concubines) through to exhortations against prevalent divorce and the upholding of 'one wife' and the creational 'two shall become one' for life advocacy in the gospel traditions and apostolic teachings. It is also noted, however, that the fullness of the kingdom of God will see no further need for the giving and taking in marriage, and the greater reality of the marriage between Christ and his Church will characterise final heavenly existence.

The second dimension to historical/traditional perspectives concerns the proper expressing of sexual relationships, largely along the lines of maintaining the boundaries of marriage, and abstinence for all outside of marriage (with celibacy the vocation and gift of some). It is within such a framework that behaviours designated *porneia* are identified, including physical same-gender sexual expressions.

Underlying this, a deeper 'theological taproot' is identified in terms of what is designated 'theological anthropology' – the way we think theologically about what it means to be human in terms bigger than the individual. In short, to be created in the image and likeness of God is to be created male and female, and this essential pairing is fundamental to what it means for the human race to exist as the crowning feature of creation. Without the introduction of one of the same kind in the form of woman, humanity is incomplete and things are 'not good' – in other words, something is lacking in creation and the image and likeness of God not given full expression. In the traditional understanding of marriage, the male-female pairing is normative for society as a whole, and foundational for the mandate to be fruitful and multiply to fill the earth and establish society as intended in the outworking of God's creational purposes.

It is from this foundation that the family unit is grounded as essential for the good order of society and the raising of children. It is also from this core institution (however instituted socially) that wider entities of home, household and kinship extend to define identity and integrate a wider sphere of hospitality and familial inclusion. While friendship and community duties are profound, marriage is distinctive in two areas: the union of one flesh (the physical giving expression to mind, soul and heart), and exclusivity – this is a lifelong union to the exclusion of all others. (For the expression of such views, see SSM&AT-VT; HSNM; CoS CD 2011 and the traditional presentation in CoS TCSSR&M 2013.)

The strength of the traditionalist position regarding marriage lies in identifying and affirming the teaching of Jesus, giving expression to the wider creational location and defining features in both creation accounts. Any case to revise our understanding of marriage needs to address the clear gospel traditions in this matter.

### *Revisionist perspectives.*

Revisionist positions are more varied, but also exhibit some common features. Marriage is understood to be a developing entity, capable of a range of expressions and forms as reflected in the narratives of Scripture. It is not essentially a static or fixed state, but one under constant adaption to changing contexts, as God's purposes develop and move towards deeper expressions of transformative and life-giving relationships. Human society is less characterised by one essential normative mode (heterosexual marriage), but by a range of circumstances and relationships that may reflect godly qualities of faithfulness, nurture and other-person focused love. Scripture reflects a depth of committed friendships and loyalties (Naomi and Ruth among them, similarly David and Jonathan) that demonstrate profound oneness of heart and affection and undoubtedly intimate expression.

Such richness of friendship, accompanied by bonds of loyalty and love is very evident and exemplified in the quality of relationships identified in gospel traditions concerning Jesus. The full humanity of Jesus was not compromised in any way by his single marital status, nor was the depth of his friendships and companionship. The community-gathering capacity of Jesus

established deeper kinship and familial dimensions and identity without his needing to experience a marital-other.

This is not to speculate on the nature of Jesus' own sexual identity (as some have done, with little basis), but to note that the clear affirmation by Jesus of marriage as a man joining his wife and the two becoming one does not preclude a wider depth of relationships to coexist socially within the wider matrix of a diverse community gathered into the kingdom. Richness of companionship and abiding in love are features of God's developing and deepening purposes in and through the kingdom of God.

Expressions of revisionist positions also have a 'theological taproot', grounded in the creation narratives. In this perspective, to be created in the image and likeness of God is to be created as a reflection and outworking of the Trinitarian nature of God. The godhead revealed in Trinity is inherently relational, and characterised by qualities of love, trust, fidelity and grace. These are to be reflected and developed in redeemed and transformed humanity, welcomed, gathered and included in Christ, and as moving towards the greater realisation of the kingdom of God as reflected in the example and teaching of Jesus.

While the kingdom progresses towards a greater expression in which there is no more giving or taking in marriage, male and female, slave and free, Jew and gentile are united and incorporated in a manner that retains identity but have less need to tie gender roles to procreation and restrict marriage to the so-called nuclear family.

Within this revisionist understanding of biblical theology, developments are evident in changing requirements under differing eras of God's law: many boundaries and categories of purity and defilement, holy and profane are set aside and made redundant in the New Testament. Consistency of ethical values and godly character are identified ultimately in the inner life of the Trinity, and as giving expression to new ways and purposes of God as still developing in our own day and age. It is through core qualities of love, nurture and faithfulness that we are to be guided into new contexts and opportunities to reflect core attributes of God. (To see further expression of revisionist views along these lines, see Haller; SSM&AT-TL; and the revisionist case in CoS TCSSR&M 2013).

The strength of the revisionist case is in pointing to the development within Scripture regarding marriage, and especially that it will not be constitutive to our identity as humans made in the image of God in the fullness of the new creation. It highlights that not all fit within a 'normative' framework, and there is much in the gospel traditions to affirm that Jesus pointedly defied social boundaries and welcomed those outside the accepted norms within the fellowship of his company. The revisionist case also addresses desire for 'good order within society', in commending committed and faithful relationships over against promiscuity and sexual experience in non-loving or uncommitted contexts.

### **Changing understandings of the purpose and definition of marriage**

The alternatives are helpfully summarised in the following extract from a significant 2010 article in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*:

*Conjugal View:* Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together. The spouses seal (consummate) and renew their union by conjugal acts—acts that constitute the behavioral part of the process of reproduction, thus uniting them as a reproductive unit. Marriage is valuable in itself, but its inherent orientation to the bearing and rearing of children contributes to its distinctive structure, including norms of monogamy and fidelity. This link to the welfare of children also helps explain why marriage is important to the common good and why the state should recognize and regulate it.

*Revisionist View:* Marriage is the union of two people (whether of the same sex or of opposite sexes) who commit to romantically loving and caring for each other and to sharing the burdens and benefits of domestic life. It is essentially a union of hearts and minds, enhanced by whatever forms of sexual intimacy both partners find

agreeable. The state should recognize and regulate marriage because it has an interest in stable romantic partnerships and in the concrete needs of spouses and any children they may choose to rear. (Girgis, Anderson & George, 246-247)

A key question that gets close to the heart of the debate and wider considerations can be stated succinctly: in considering the introduction and support for same-sex marriage, are we taking an existing notion of marriage and *extending* it to include couples of the same gender, or are we essentially *redefining* what we mean by marriage?

It is not my place to answer that question, but it does frame a key issue in the presentations to follow. Are there key elements that constitute the notion of marriage that cannot be stripped away without changing its essential identity, or is marriage a flexible notion that can be adapted and extended while retaining its primary character and definition?

Another way of bringing a focus to this is to look at the introduction to the notion of marriage at the start of the marriage liturgy in *A New Zealand Prayer Book (NZPB)*: other than changing the gender, what else would need to change in the introduction which outlines God's purposes for marriage?

In the First Form, the first introductory paragraph focuses on marriage as the bonding of husband and wife in a lifelong union in which 'they fulfil their love for each other'. Other than changing the gender, the paragraph could be extended to include other pairings willing to make such a commitment to one other.

However, the next paragraph would most likely need to be omitted:

Marriage is given to provide stability necessary for family life so that children may be cared for lovingly and grow to full maturity.

It is notable that the Second Form of Marriage Liturgy omits any reference to children or the development of family life: the focus is entirely on quality of life shared by the couple, with the support of friends and as recognised by wider society. The Third Form provides alternate statements at each point, one of which includes reference to 'providing mutual support and a stability in which their children may grow.'

I would have to say that this forms a stark contrast with the two forms of marriage provided in the *A Prayer Book for Australia (APBA)*. In the First Order of service, the introduction leads with:

'Our Lord Jesus Christ said of marriage that 'From the beginning of creation God made them male and female. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. What therefore God has joined together, let no one put asunder."

After mention of marriage as the symbol of God's unending love for his people, and of the union between Christ and his church, and noting due honour to be accorded to marriage, the introduction also includes the statement that in marriage

'a new family is established in accordance with God's purpose, so that children might be born and nurtured in secure and loving care, for their well-being and instruction, and for the good order of society, to the glory of God.'

A similar, although shorter, sentence is included in the Second Order. In summary, the theology of marriage reflected in the *APBA* would require significant amendment to accommodate any revisionist understanding of marriage that extends significantly beyond a change of gender. The Second Form of marriage liturgy in the *NZPB* has already moved comprehensively in this direction, and similarly is provided for in the Third Form.

### **Key questions, proposals and options**

Where to from here? The experience of a number of theology task groups and reports has been that a consensus position is unattainable. Two theologies of marriage are identified

within the Church (and Communion), and attempts to bring these two approaches together has so far not been achieved. Indeed, it would be fair to say that no revisionist case for any change from or beyond a traditional theology of marriage has succeeded (to date) to gain anything approaching consensus. Most energy has been directed to how two differing theologies of marriage might co-exist in the witness and pastoral life of the church.

The analysis in *True Union* (9-10) helpfully identifies three distinctive proposals coming from advocates for change:

1. Some argue the case for recognising *non-marital* same-sex relationships (see the UK LGCM *Statement of Conviction*: 'it is entirely compatible with the Christian faith not only to love another person of the same sex but also to express that love fully in a personal, sexual relationship' (as cited in *True Body*, 9). Some form of blessing of committed non-marital sexual relationships akin to that recognised by civil partnerships does not seek to conform to marital expectations, but the creation of a new pattern of relationship.

No national church has entertained let alone formally accepted such change, although there is some debate and dissent in Australia about the expectations in this area as required by an undertaking to uphold *Faithfulness in Service* by all in Church leadership positions. The key phrasing reads as follows:

7.2 Sexuality is a gift from God and is integral to human nature. It is appropriate for clergy and church workers to value this gift, taking responsibility for their sexual conduct by maintaining chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage.

2. An increasing number of advocates argue for recognising same-sex partnerships and civil unions as one and the same as marriage (whether heterosexual or otherwise). This is essentially the approach adopted where political jurisdictions have amended state marriage acts to accommodate same sex marriage, and it is along these lines that the Church is urged to revise its liturgies and recognition.

3. Another approach can be seen in those who urge the acceptance of some form of 'covenantal union' that is in many aspects comparable to marriage, yet distinguished from marriage as traditionally identified with the possibility of procreation and the establishment of a family unit and household for the raising of children. The question of whether such a 'covenantal union' (however designated) entails life-long and exclusive undertakings is not clear.

### **Theological considerations**

A number of theological considerations have been noted above, but it is important to revisit them at this stage. Both revisionist and traditional perspectives identify theological 'taproots'. The former adopt Trinitarian frameworks, understood in relational modes and given expression as a model for a range of human relationships. A strong correlation is proposed between being in the image and likeness of God revealed in Trinity, and a quality of relationship and companionship which supports and reflects such characteristics of God in terms of committed love, faithfulness and nurture. The gender of those in such relationships is secondary, and not definitive of marriage.

More traditional formulations highlight the essential pairing of male and female as integral for human existence and development. While recognising that sexual expression is not only directed in Scripture towards procreation and the creation of families, it does affirm that the above is essential for the ongoing viability of human existence, and normative for the 'safe order of society, to the glory of God'.

The point is succinctly and starkly expressed by Karl Barth (as quoted in *True Body*, 18):

The primal form of all co-human community is the (not only 'nuptial', but the whole natural) counterparts of man and woman.

The distinctiveness of male and female, within the context of both sharing a common humanity, forms an essential element for the search for a companion corresponding to the



other that satisfies the otherwise 'not good' state of creation. In this, a companion of the same gender will not provide a solution to the man being 'alone'. Gender is essential to the narrative, and inter-dependence between the two sexes as exemplified in marriage provides an ongoing dimension to the identity of humans in the image and likeness of God throughout Scripture.

The point is again articulated more fully in the SMR 2005 (§30):

While men and women, having been created in the image of God, share a perfect equality as human persons, they also participate in the genetic difference of their maleness and femaleness. Historically, many have understood this to be a relationship of complementarity, in which men and women, in being created by God, were created male and female precisely for one another (*Gen 2:18-24*). In their equal dignity as persons, as well as in their difference as male and female, a man and woman may form 'one flesh' in marriage, and thereby make possible the continuation of human life, as ordained and commanded by God (*Gen 2:24; 1:28*).

This is understood to be the foundation of the institution of marriage (*Mt 19:4; Mk 10:6*). In creating human beings male and female, then, God created them with the potential not only to 'be united' in a relationship of love and creative complementarity, but to 'be fruitful' in that union. Without either male or female, without both man and woman, the perpetuation of human life in the created order would not be possible.

### **Pastoral considerations**

Discussions in this area draw on a much wider set of social realities and experiences, including wider pastoral questions about the prevalence of sexual experience outside of marriage, including the development of a 'friends with benefits' sub-culture. As sexual experience has developed and is now normalised apart from the previously almost inevitable consequences of pregnancy and childbirth, so too the need for social boundaries limited to marriage and family formation has to a large extent reduced, and newer contexts for sexual expression are advocated and widely practised, creating widespread counter-cultural pressure within the church.

Reflection on the handling of debate over the decriminalisation of homosexual conduct suggests that we have much to learn. We have as a Church all-too-frequently spoken from a distance and issued statements shaped in response to internal church debates that have not translated well into our public witness.

There can be no simple responses to such profound questions and experiences. However, I find a set of gospel stances as expressed in *True Body* (33-37, building on the work of the *St Andrews Day Statement*) to be particularly helpful. Framed with reference to major biblical themes of divine revelation, redemption and resurrection leading to transformation, the authors commend the following responses:

1. *Forgiving Grace*: The Church must 'reaffirm the good news of salvation in Christ'
2. *Welcoming Grace*: The Church must 'give constant encouragement in following Christ not only to those who conform to one of these two vocations [marriage and singleness], but to all who seriously intend discipleship in fellowship with the body of Christ.'
3. *Transforming Grace*: The Church must re-affirm the good news of 'transformation of life.'
4. *Costly Grace*: The Church must 'assist all its members to a life of faithful witness and holiness'.

I would hope that, regardless of our own views and convictions, we may affirm together such a pastoral response and approach as reflecting our calling to live by the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and give expression to what it means to pray 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'

Tim Harris

August, 2013.

### Select Reading List

#### Reports and Statements

- IIHS 1991 *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England.* Church House Publishing, 1991
- True Union *True Union in the Body? A contribution to the discussion within the Anglican Communion concerning the public blessing of same-sex unions.* A Paper commissioned by the Most Revd Drexel Wellington Gomez, Archbishop of the West Indies. (Andrew Goddard and Peter Walker), 2003
- SIHS 2003 *Some issues in human sexuality. A guide to the debate. A discussion document from the House of Bishops' Group on Issues in Human Sexuality.* Church House Publishing, 2003
- SMR 2005 *The St Michael Report.* Report of the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions. (Rt. Rev. Victoria Matthews, Chair) 2005.
- FiF *Faithfulness in Fellowship: Reflections on Homosexuality and the Church.* Papers from the Doctrine Panel of the Anglican Church of Australia. John Garratt, 2001
- FiS *Faithfulness in Service: A national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers.* General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia Child Protection Committee (as adopted with some variations by each diocese)
- SSR 2010 *Same-Sex Relationships in the Life of the Church - College for Bishops (The Episcopal Church).* Edited by Dr. Ellen T. Charry. Offered by The Theology Committee of the House of Bishops. 2010; Reproduced in *Anglican Theological Review* 93:1
- SSM&AT-VT 'Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: A View from the Traditionalists'. John E Goldingay, Grant R LeMarquand, George R Sumner, Daniel A. Westberg. *ATR* 93:1, 1-50
- SSM&AT-TL 'Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: A View from the Liberals. Deirdre J Good, Willis J Jenkins, Cynthia B Kittredge, Eugene F Rogers, *ATR* 93:1, 51-88
- CoS CD 2011 *The Contemporary Debate: The Contemporary Debate: Believing in Marriage* [http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/9647/05\\_MIS\\_Sl.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/9647/05_MIS_Sl.pdf)
- CoS TCSSR&M 2013 *Theological Commission on Same Sex Relationships and the Ministry.* Church of Scotland. 2013. Accessed from [http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/13811/20\\_THEOLOGICAL\\_2013.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/13811/20_THEOLOGICAL_2013.pdf)

#### Secondary

- Gagnon Robert A. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics.* Abingdon, 2002.

- Girgis, Anderson & George. 'Sherif Girgis, Ryan Anderson and Robert George, What Is Marriage?' *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* (Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 245-287, Winter 2010)
- Groves Philip Groves (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality: A resource to enable listening and dialogue*. Anglican Consultative Council & SPCK, 2008
- Haller Tobias Stanislas Haller, *Reasonable and Holy, Engaging Same-sexuality*. Seabury Books, 2009.
- Jeal Roy R. Jeal (ed.) *Human Sexuality and the Nuptial Mystery*. Cascade, 2010
- Loader William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*. SPCK/Westminster John Knox, 2010
- Via & Gagnon Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*. Fortress, 2003
- Whalon 'Notes for a Theology of Same-sex Relationships.' The Rt. Rev. Pierre W. Whalon. PDF file © 2011. Available at:

[http://bishopblogging.org/Bishopblogging/Interviews,\\_&c.\\_files/Notes%20for%20a%20Theology.2.11.pdf](http://bishopblogging.org/Bishopblogging/Interviews,_&c._files/Notes%20for%20a%20Theology.2.11.pdf)