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Exploring Theology of Marriage – Peter Carrell

Two theologies of marriage: working from creation and companionship

Introduction

What is going on when we debate the nature of marriage and seemingly cannot find a resolution to the debate? Are people obtuse? Is there a need for further education? Or, is there a substantive difference in theologies of marriage at work in the debate?

This morning I want to focus our thinking on two broad theologies of marriage which I see at work in current debates, locally and globally. I will explore these theologies and some of the significance of their strengths and weaknesses. Then I will offer some analogies for how we might handle this particular theological difference. I will try not to advocate for any position save that our church should explore its future in relation to these two theologies with the utmost care and caution.¹

I acknowledge that I am associated with the conservative side of the debate within the Anglican church of these islands but I am trying to set that aside in favour of another association which I have, working for the unity of God's church.²

These two theologies I describe respectively as theology of creational marriage and theology of evolutionary marriage. With some minor differences they have been explained at this conference in Tim Harris' address, in terms of 'historical/traditional perspectives' and 'revisionist perspectives'.³

Both theologies have their roots in Genesis 1 and 2. The importance of these two chapters for theology of marriage cannot be overstated.

Genesis 1 and 2: two insights

Genesis 1 and 2, as we have already been reminded today, tell the story of the beginning of humanity.⁴ In that story we learn about God's creating humanity as male and female in his image (Genesis 1:27), that there will be procreation (1:28), that 'the man should not be alone' (2:18) and that a man and a woman will form an exclusive, embodied or fleshly unity (2:24). From features in the narrative such as these, two great insights about marriage are conveyed: they concern creation (i.e. procreation) and companionship.

Procreation

It is widely agreed that marriage has something to do with human procreation, with the advancement of human life through the generations. If we turn to the Book of Common Prayer, we read, 'First, It [marriage] was ordained for the procreation of children'.⁵ Or we might ask why a couple who have lived together have now decided to marry and find we get the answer, "Oh, we want to start a family." On any reckoning, marriage has a very strong association with procreation.

Companionship

Marriage also has something to do with human companionship. The stunning “therefore” of Genesis 2:24 comes at the end of the section which begins with divine concern about companionship, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone’ (Genesis 2:18).⁶

Later in Scripture, it is clear that a widow or widower is free to remarry, without the constraint that this should only be so if children could result (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39; cf. 1 Timothy 5:14). Such marriages may not lead to procreation but they involve companionship.⁷

Debated insights

Procreation and companionship are two great insights into what marriage is about. Today they stand at the centre of debate. What precisely is the association between procreation and marriage? What is the nature of the companionship in marriage? Is marriage about both procreation and companionship or does one trump the other as decisive in debate about definition of marriage?⁸

Creational marriage

When Christians argue that marriage requires a man and a woman for the purpose of making a family and we tie this into Genesis 1 and 2, perhaps shaped by traditional Catholic, Orthodox or conservative evangelical perspectives,⁹ then we offer a theology of marriage which I describe as ‘creational marriage.’

Creational marriage is marriage as it flows from the story of creation, characterised by the one flesh unity of male and female providing companionship for one another and children to multiply the human community. Marriage, on this account, is humanity organising itself to continue the procreation of life from one generation to another.

Marriage in the teaching of Jesus is firmly creational as he cites from Genesis 1 and 2.¹⁰ Likewise Ephesians tells us something about marriage in 5:25-33 as it firmly anchors its understanding of marriage into Genesis 2:24 (in Ephesians 5:31).¹¹

For both Jesus and Paul, what was laid down in the beginning of Jewish scripture, Genesis 1 and 2 is determinative for Christian understanding of marriage as the permanent union of a man and a woman.¹²

Evolutionary marriage

When Christians argue that marriage is a human institution which has changed over the course of human history and observe that marriage has taken a variety of forms in different cultures and developed strategies in the face of challenges then they are offering an account of ‘evolutionary marriage.’

Evolutionary marriage, in theological terms, is marriage as it adapts and adjusts in the course of history, from creation to the present.¹³

A theology of evolutionary marriage does not deny the account given by a theology of creational marriage, it says to that account, ‘There is more to say’.

Within the biblical narrative itself we find adaptation of marriage. Marriage is used to shape the transfer of property through the generations.¹⁴ It has been a tool of imperial expansion through alliances with many nations and then been adapted through compulsory divorce in order to constrain racial purity.¹⁵ Sometimes social and economic requirements led to polygamy.¹⁶ Hardness of hearts between husbands and wives resulted in divorce and remarriages.¹⁷ While incest is forbidden by Levitical law, curious stories featuring incest are told.¹⁸

Within the New Testament, marriage has evolutionary dimensions. Jesus praised those who left their marriages or gave up the prospect of marriage for his sake.¹⁹ Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 can say a lot about marriage but next to nothing about the procreative purpose of marriage (which is consistent with absence of reference to Genesis 1:28 in the teaching of Jesus).²⁰ And what Paul has to say is slanted, under the urgency of the imminent parousia of Christ, against marriage.²¹ Be single if possible, he says; only marry if you must.²² Again, such approaches to marriage are expressive of marriage as an *evolving* human institution.

Evolutionary marriage is a theological approach to understanding the nature of marriage which allows for that nature to adapt to circumstances.²³ In an age in which a married couple can choose not to have children, when a same-sex couple can have children, when parliaments are legislating for marriage to be entered into by any two people, when divorce is ubiquitous, a theology of evolutionary marriage is able to embrace such changes.²⁴

By contrast the observable tendency of exponents of creational marriage theology is to resist such changes.

Just as a theology of creational marriage can appeal to Scripture to support that resistance, so a theology of evolutionary marriage can appeal to Scripture to support that embrace.²⁵ Working, for instance, on companionship as a feature of marriage (that is, the desire to overcome the difficulty of being 'alone'),²⁶ and the capacity of any two people to form a partnership marked by love, faithfulness and permanency, this theology offers a Scriptural case for embracing adaptive change.²⁷

We can go a little further. A theology of evolutionary marriage can draw on the role of the Holy Spirit in leading the church to confront change it would prefer to avoid (citing, perhaps, particularly Acts 15 and Acts 10).²⁸ It can also draw in scientific knowledge in order to talk about the varieties of human experience of sexuality which may need accommodating in a changing understanding of marriage.²⁹

Two Respectable Theologies?

In setting out these two theologies in this way, we draw out some of the strengths of each approach. Other strengths could be noted. Creational marriage, for instance, can make a virtue of being traditional and of being ecumenical. Evolutionary marriage can make a virtue of being passionate and of being inclusive. If we allow these strengths to each approach, I suggest we might appreciate why we are involved in a debate which despite the fervent wishes of some, will not go away.³⁰

This is reinforced by considering some weaknesses for these theologies. Both theologies have weaknesses to address.

For a theology of creational marriage I suggest a significant weakness lies in respect of how its supporters respond to real life situations. If Scripture offers a coherent theology of creational marriage, how far is this theology to be followed in respect of the reality that at the vicarage door combinations of couples can appear requesting weddings which are not a tight fit with creational theology?

He has been divorced twice and she has never married before. Let's make that slightly more complicated: they have been living together and already have a child. To make the dilemma a little more acute: what kind of companionship will they have because he is agnostic and she is a keen believer in Christ? Will the minister marry them or turn down their request?

A minister comfortable in the skin of evolutionary marriage theology arguably will have a more straightforward time responding to such a request. But there are weaknesses for evolutionary marriage theology to consider.

With respect to Genesis 1 and 2, the question of a strong connection between creation of humanity as male and female, procreation and companionship arises.³¹ Does evolutionary marriage go too far if and when it advocates that marriage need not involve gender differentiation? This question may be made sharper if it is allowed that in a Christian reading of Genesis 1 and 2, humanity made in the image of God is a making by the God who is Trinity. That is, the God who is diversity-in-unity makes marriage to be the human icon of that Trinitarian diversity-in-unity: the diversity of the two gender differentiated creatures, man and woman, becoming one flesh is an image of the three divine Persons being One substance.³² A final sharpening of the question comes by considering marriage also as a symbol of the goal of the universe itself, the marriage between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5, Revelation 21-22).³³

Conversely, it is possible to make a case for acceptance of permanent, stable, faithful same-sex partnerships without seeking to either extend or change the traditional definition of marriage.³⁴

In the broadest of generalizations, then, the strength of a theology of creational marriage lies in its exposition of Scripture on marriage while its weakness lies in its pastoral application to the realities of life.

Conversely, the strength of a theology of evolutionary marriage lies in its pastoral adaptability to the realities of life while its weakness is its account of marriage in theological terms.³⁵

A way forward?

A few observations about prospects of a way forward:

First, *it is not easy to see where a synthesis of these two theologies lies*. Obviously we would move beyond our debate if we could find a single theology of marriage which was strong theologically and strong pastorally. But these two theologies are divided theologies. Insistence on a man and a woman at the heart of a marriage does not admit of a middle ground with insistence that this gender difference need not be so. Or, to take a different issue, insistence that a remarriage can take place after divorce and insistence that it cannot does not present an immediately obvious middle way.

Secondly, *on what basis might we advocate for the two theologies co-exist, side by side within the one fellowship.*

I want to reflect on several possibilities, several analogies which might offer a clue to the future.

Human Dignity – an analogy with Pacifism and Militarism

Earlier this year, at the fourth Hermeneutical Hui, Bishop Jim White offered an analogy to theologies of pacifism and militarism sitting within the life of the Anglican church without leading to division.³⁶ (Militarism here simply means a willingness to engage in war (e.g. on just war principles) and to minister among the military forces through supply of chaplaincies).

Pacifism and militarism involve differences (among other things) in respect of *human dignity*. How are we to respect the image of God in another person? Pacifism says, ‘By not acting violently towards the other’. Militarism says, ‘By acting violently towards some in order to protect others.’

Theologies of marriage are concerned with human dignity. It is a lively question, then, whether a church which refuses to choose between pacifism and militarism could also be a church *which refuses to choose between theologies of creational marriage and evolutionary marriage.*

A related question is whether a church which respects both pacifism and militarism could be a church which respects both theologies of marriage.

Sacramental action – an analogy with baptism

The Anglican church and the Baptist church are examples of churches in which mutually different theologies of baptism cannot co-exist. A paedobaptist cannot baptise infants within the Baptist church and an Anglican or Roman priest cannot refuse to undertake baptisms of infants when presented by believing parents.³⁷

Infant baptism and believers’ baptism, involve differences (among other things) in respect of *sacramental action*.³⁸ Upon whom may the sacramental action of the church in baptism be enacted: adults only or adults and children?

Theology of marriage leads to the church offering (in Anglican terms) a sacramental action in which two are joined as one before God.

The two theologies of marriage give differing answers in respect of sacramental action. Upon whom may matrimony be enacted? Creational marriage answers, ‘Only on a man and a woman who seek holy matrimony.’ Evolutionary marriage answers, ‘On any two people who seek holy matrimony.’

In the case of baptism in the Anglican and Baptist churches, a discipline is generally exercised: infants will be baptised in Anglican churches and clergy cannot refuse to conduct such baptisms (assuming a few conditions are met).

Conversely, Baptist pastors are likely to receive short shrift by their congregations if found to be performing infant baptisms. The two approaches cannot co-exist in the one church.³⁹

On this analogy, a change to the sacramental action of the church concerning marriage would be a huge matter. It could be accompanied by a discipline which would see ordained priests ordered to conduct weddings of same sex couples.

Conversely, a continuing refusal to change the sacramental action concerning marriage would be significant as it would be a vote against the validity of theology of evolutionary marriage. On either way forward, division could occur, as it has occurred historically in the Church of England over baptism.

Theological disagreement – an analogy with the filioque clause

We could also think about the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed, the matter of whether we say ‘We believe in the Holy Spirit ... who proceeds from the Father and the Son’ or ‘We believe in the Holy Spirit ... who proceeds from the Father.’

Some Anglicans are keen to retain it (e.g. because this is a proper reading of Scripture; because this is the Roman position (with whom we wish to be drawing closer to); because this is *our* Western tradition).

Some are keen to drop it (e.g. because this is a proper reading of Scripture; because this is the Eastern position (with whom we might be able to draw closer to than to Rome); because this is the most ancient Christian tradition, preceding the schism between East and West).

As far as I know, no Anglican church has divided over this difference (though no doubt some people have left the Anglican church because of it, e.g. to join the Eastern Orthodox).

Now there is an immediate difficulty with this analogy because when a congregation says the Nicene creed it must say it with or without the filioque clause. While the official position of the church is that the Nicene Creed includes the filioque clause, the reality on the ground (so I hear) is that local choice is made. But, noting some suggestions that a way forward for the church on blessing same-sex partnerships is that local choice might prevail, we can note that the Anglican church could survive if ministry units A, B, and C retain the filioque clause and ministry units X, Y, and Z omit it. Does this holding together of theology division via local choice offer an insight as to the way forward?

Ministry calling – an analogy with the relationship between ordained ministry and lay ministry

For churches in which ordination occurs as a distinctive and separating action in which some of the people of God are set aside for particular ministries an explanation about ministry is given which goes like this: all God’s people are ministers, ministry in the church is something we all participate in, but only some are called into ordained ministry.

In such churches the fact that sometimes unhealthy distinction between ordained and laity occurs (e.g. when ordained ministers think they are more worthy than the laity, or, conversely, when the laity place their ordained ministers ‘on a pedestal’) does not lead to abolishing ordination or to ordaining everyone. Rather we work that bit harder to overcome such unnecessary distinction. We seek to explain more clearly that ordination does not make the ordained minister a more worthy minister than a lay minister, it simply expresses a distinctive calling in the service of God.

Is there an analogy here in respect of marriage? All God's people are called into relationship (family relationships, friendships, partnerships in ministry and in business), some are called into marriage (a man and a woman being joined together to begin a new family). A same-sex partnership on this analogy could be honoured by the church as an accepted even blessed relationship without confusing this relationship with marriage. Marriage on this understanding would be a distinctive calling within the possibilities for human relationships.

Anecdotally I hear some of my fellow Christians saying that we could be united as a church if we preserve marriage as it is but find room to honour other partnerships.

Finally

So, do any or all these analogies offer a way forward for us? Can we co-exist with two theologies of marriage? Must we divide so that each theology has a unified church around it?

To such questions I offer no easy answers!

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[Postscript (added Tuesday 20 August 2013)]

I note several comments re the use of analogies made at the conference. The words are my words, interpreting/reporting what was said to me.

1. All analogies eventually fail.
2. (Spoken to me by Rev Dr Colin Brown, Christchurch). The analogy of family in which sharp differences are experienced, but the family does not break up.
3. (Noted by Bishop Tim Harris in his Saturday 17 August 2013 afternoon address based on what he had heard at the conference). The analogy of 'receptive ecumenism' in which two (or more) differing churches focus less on whether they might ever be united and more on what they can learn from each other and on how the other can make them to be better (e.g. Anglicans learn from Lutherans how to be better Anglicans.)

Appendix

'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth".' Genesis 1:27-28

'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.' Genesis 2:24-25

[As part of a reply concerning divorce] 'But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and

female'. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate".' Mark 10:5-9 cf. Matthew 19:4-6

' "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.' Ephesians 5:31-32

¹ Advocacy for one theology or the other being 'the theology' we ought to subscribe to has its place in the continuing debate but my purpose today is to encourage respectful participation in the debate between the two theologies rather than to attempt to conclude the debate with some kind of adversarial tour de force. (As if I could do that!)

² For what it is worth, I try to keep an open mind on the matters before us. Within that mind I currently have as yet unpublished conclusions and provisional conclusions which are far from ready for publication.

³ In turn these perspectives relate respectively to 'essentialist' and 'constructionist' understandings of marriage, as described in Tim Harris' paper.

⁴ That we can detect two creation narratives joined together in the first chapters of Genesis does not alter the fact that these chapters in Genesis present to the reader one continuous story. My view is the first narrative places humanity at the climax of creation and the second narrative places humanity in the centre of creation.

⁵ In the service of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) titled 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony'. The beginning of the service explains 'the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.'

⁶ Cited scriptural texts in this paper are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

⁷ In making this observation I am not attempting to end any discussion about the priority or primacy of procreation for marriage. But it is observable to us all that long after procreation has occurred in marriage or where procreation is not possible, companionship is important to the strength and growth of a marriage.

⁸ At this point I acknowledge a whole debate passed over in this paper, a debate which is focused on attempts to answer a question such as 'what does the Bible say about homosexuality? One lead into that debate in a thin book which nevertheless aims to represent both 'liberal' and 'conservative' approaches to the Bible and homosexuality is Dan O. Via and Robert A.J. Gagnon's *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003

⁹ On the official teaching of the Roman Catholic church on marriage, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Suva, Fiji: CEPAC, 1994) Article 7: The Sacrament of Marriage, especially sections 1601-1605. On Eastern Orthodox understanding that history in the perspective of the Bible begins and ends with marriage (Adam and Eve, marriage of the Bride to the Lamb), on the remembrance of historic marriages in the Orthodox wedding ceremony, the husband being the icon of Christ and the wife being the icon of the church, see "Marriage" in *The Orthodox Study Bible* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008, p. 1607. For a conservative evangelical theology of marriage see Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* IVP, 2003.

¹⁰ Though with some complication: as noted below, despite Jesus citing Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (i.e. drawing on both creation stories) he does not cite the command to be fruitful and multiply (1:28). Nevertheless, in the time of Jesus (indeed more or less in all human history up to the introduction of routinely effective contraception, to endorse the one flesh unity of a married couple was to endorse their openness to procreative fruit from that unity.

¹¹ Thus Wesley Hill sympathetically reviewing James V. Brownson's *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, Eerdmans, 2013 (in "Gunning For Complementarity", *The Living Church*, June 23, 2013, pp. 18-20) observes, 'Brownson maintains that the marital relationship established in Genesis 2:24 is not based on "gender complementarity." One might be able to read Genesis 2:24 in its Old Testament context and arrive at that conclusion (though this might overlook the canonical movement from the necessity of procreation in the old covenant to the redefinition of family by "new birth" in the new), but the usage of the text in Ephesians 5 makes such a reading highly unlikely.' In passing, note the use of Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16, 'Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh".' Paul appears to be saying that casual sex is never casual because it takes on the same significance as married sex: two people are united in one flesh.

¹² A single text to consider in relation to the New Testament passages, alongside standard commentaries, is William Loader's *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*, London: SPCK, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010. A follow up text in relation to 'creational marriage' is Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, Robert P. George's *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* New York: Encounter Books, 2012. They offer a 'secular argument' for the significance of marriage between a man and a woman. In doing so, they distinguish between 'conjugal marriage' (which has some coherency with the notion of 'creational marriage' here) and 'revisionist marriage' (likewise re 'evolutionary marriage' here). Their argument for the importance of conjugal marriage is impressive. I am not convinced that their argument against revisionist marriage being recognised in law is persuasive: that A is good and B is damaging to A is not an argument against the law permitting both A and B. The law might recognise business competition (A) while also providing for instances of monopoly control of a product or service (B). For other readings related to 'creational marriage' see Roy R. Jeal (ed.) *Human Sexuality and the Nuptial Mystery* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010, especially: Ephraim Radner, "The Nuptial Mystery: The Historical Flesh of Procreation", pp. 85-115; Roy R. Jeal, "Visions of Marriage in Ephesians 5", pp. 116-131; Christopher R. J. Holmes, "Becoming One: The Christian Story and the Politics of Marriage", pp. 131-147; Tim Perry, "Forbid Them Not: The Place of Children in a Theology of Marriage", pp. 148-164.

¹³ Thus I prefer 'evolutionary marriage' to 'revisionist marriage' as a description of this theology. 'Revisionist' places emphasis on intentional revising of the doctrine of marriage, with potential for a negative tone to enter debate, so 'revisionist' becomes an epithet rather than a neutral description. 'Evolutionary' allows for any such intentional revising going on in modern debate while also capturing the changing nature of marriage through history, whether that has had a deliberative or accidental quality to it. (I do not think Jacob set out to revise marriage when he accepted that he had been tricked into marriage with Leah and determined that he would also carry through his desire to marry Rachel! But marriage evolving into polygamy took a step forward at that point).

¹⁴ An outstanding biblical example is the story of the marriage of Boaz and Ruth in the *Book of Ruth*.

¹⁵ Imperial expansion: Solomon, favoured by God with the gift of wisdom, married Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 7:8) and later married more than 'seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines', drawn from the surrounding nations (1 Kings 11:1-8). But the Lord's anger against Solomon seemed to be sparked by the (inevitable) succumbing to idolatry introduced by the foreign wives, rather than by his polygamous state per se (11:9). Racial purity: Ezra 10 tells the story of putting away of foreign wives because these marriages have 'increased the guilt of Israel' (10:10). This mass break up of marriages (and families, 'they sent them away with their children, Ezra 10:44) served the cause of Israel re-establishing its life after the Exile.

¹⁶ Sarai giving Hagar to Abram 'as a wife' (Genesis 16:3) was an attempt to produce a child who would be a child for Sarai (16:2), an heir for Abram (which he did not become, Genesis 17-18) in order that the inheritance of Abram would not go to a distant relative, Eliezer of Damascus (15:1-6). Later Jacob will marry sisters Leah and Rachel (the former against his intention but according to the manipulation of his father-in-law) along with their respective maids, Zilpah and Bilhah, all within a story of marriage within an extended family and dealings and double dealings over property (Genesis 29-31).

¹⁷ Note Jesus' analysis of why Moses permitted divorce (Mark 10:4-5).

¹⁸ Israel's laws prohibited incest within 'forbidden degrees' (Leviticus 18:6-18) yet told stories in which incest was a feature (e.g. Abram marrying his half-sister, Genesis 12 with Genesis 20:12; Lot's daughters, Genesis 19:30-38). Nevertheless the latter story highlighted the folly of incest and did so in a wider social context in which (e.g.) incest was tolerated by the royal families of Egypt. Note also that *the way the story of the first humans is told* in Genesis 1-4, the wives of Cain and Abel, logically, were their sisters.

¹⁹ Luke 18:29 includes commendation of those who leave 'wife ... for the sake of the kingdom of God', though the parallel texts in Matthew 19:29 and Mark 10:29-30 make no reference to wives. In Matthew 19:12 Jesus says that 'there are eunuchs who have made themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.' While this verse is much discussed because it is enigmatic, a reasonable interpretation of the cited phrase is that some disciples give up marriage for the sake of the kingdom.

²⁰ The NEB offers a curious 'charter' for remarriage after divorce: 'Has your marriage been dissolved? Do not seek a wife. If, however, you do marry, there is nothing wrong in it;' (7:27b-28a). Compare NRSV: 'Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you do not sin'. This better reflects an ambiguity in the Greek which could mean that Paul is speaking about betrothal (and the obligation to continue to marriage being dissolved).

²¹ To the extent that both Jesus and Paul understood the parousia or return of Christ as imminent, it is logical that they did not mention the importance of procreation in marriage. Nevertheless they understood that marriage usually produced children (see e.g. 1 Timothy 5:14).

²² Note especially 1 Corinthians 7:6-8, 17-24, 26-28, 32-38, with 7:38 as summary.

²³ A classic text for the theology of evolutionary marriage is Rowan Williams' essay *The Body's Grace* (e.g. at http://www.igreens.org.uk/bodys_grace.htm [at 10 August 2013]).

²⁴ For a handy set of investigations into a variety of 'modern' issues in sexual ethics, see Marvin M. Ellison's *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012. For a presentation argument that same-sex partnerships accord with Scripture, see Jeffrey John, *'Permanent, Faithful, Stable': Christian Same-Sex Partnerships* London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1993 and 2000. For a counter argument see Stephen F. Noll, *Two Sexes One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Marriage* Solon, OH: Latimer, 1997. Important now as a text for evolutionary marriage is Tobias Stanislas Haller's *Reasonable and Holy: Engaging Same-Sexuality* Seabury Books, 2009 (also at <http://reasonableandholy.blogspot.co.nz/>). My critique of the book includes its diminishment of differences between male and female and of importance of procreation for marriage, http://hermdownunder.blogspot.co.nz/2012/01/reasonable-and-holy-engaging-same_741.html.

²⁵ By making this observation in this way I am not saying that there is a level playing field on which each theology constitutes an equal match for the other. A feature of the debate between the two theologies is the claim that the 'other' does not read Scripture well.

²⁶ In this connection see Michael Vasey *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995 and, contrastingly, Thomas E. Schmidt *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the homosexuality debate* Leicester: IVP, 1995. Also Matthew Mason, "What is Marriage" <http://www.saet-online.org/what-is-marriage/05/> [viewed 10 August 2013]. When marriage is defined in terms of companionship it is ironically true that the argument for marriage requiring a man and a woman is harder to make and the argument for marriage being between only two people is weakened.

²⁷ For a careful posing of the question whether same-sex relationships might be blessed by God in a manner analogous to the blessing of a heterosexual marriage, see Paragraph 31 of *Report of the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same Sex Unions* also known as the *Saint Michael Report*, available at <http://www.anglican.ca/primate/ptc/smr/> (as viewed 8 August 2013).

²⁸ That is, the example of the early Jewish church being confronted through revelation from God (Acts 10) and testimony of fruitful mission (Acts 15) and making an adaptive change in respect of inclusion of the Gentiles without insisting that they conform to Jewish laws about food and circumcision.

²⁹ With acknowledgement for the prompting of the Rev. Barbara Vincent, but the following thoughts are my responsibility, note the second and third reasons for marriage in "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" in the *Book of Common Prayer*: (2nd) 'It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.' (3rd) 'It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.' In a world discovering a range of sexualities (e.g. straight, GLBT, cf. +Gene Robinson, 'There are so many other letters in the alphabet. There are so many other sexualities to be explored' as reported (e.g.) at <http://www.gcmwatch.com/4697/gay-bishop-urges-exploration-of-other-sexualities>), does the church need to embrace and welcome the possibility that *all* may receive this remedy (second reason) and experience the blessing of marriage (third reason) *irrespective of sexuality*? Is that a simple question to answer? I suggest it is more complicated than it looks because society (let alone the church) is unlikely to tolerate *all sexualities* being affirmed through marriage. To give just one example, an incestuous relationship meets a standard of 'companionship' for marriage, presumably provides both 'remedy' and other blessings, but it is unlikely to ever be approved in civil or canonical law. In turn such example raises the question of the basis on which a line is drawn between one set of sexualities being approved and another set not so. A further question likely to be canvassed *within the church* is whether the church has the power within itself to *extend the definition of marriage*. It is a possibility that the new found knowledge about the range of sexualities only points to the possibility of accepting new forms of relationship (distinct from marriage between a man and a woman) as a fact of contemporary human life rather than blessing them *in God's name*. What science tells us 'is' the case does not tell us what 'ought' to be the case.

³⁰ A curious book in the context of the present paper is Jana Marguerite Bennett's *Water Is Thicker Than Blood: An Augustinian Theology of Marriage and Singleness* Oxford: OUP, 2008. Invoking Augustine (with counterpoint to John Chrysostom), on the face of it, is to draw out a theology of creational marriage. But

Bennett's emphasis on the household of God as the context for understanding marriage and singleness and how each contributes within that one household to the economy of God, including, as per her title, noting the 'thicker' tie of baptism over biological family for relationships creates immense possibility for a theology of evolutionary marriage.

³¹ As argued in the paper at this conference "Creation and the Theology of Sexuality" by Sue Patterson.

³² See, e.g. Brian Edgar, "Sexuality, the Image of God and the Doctrine of the Trinity" in Brian Edgar and Gordon Preece (eds.) *Whose Homosexuality Which Authority: Homosexual practice, marriage, ordination and the church* Adelaide: ATF, 2006 (=Interface 9/1&2 May and October 2006), pp. 137-150. Also in the same volume, with special reference to theology of creation and to differentiation/unity in creation, and much more, Bryden Black, "Whose Language? Which Grammar?: 'Inclusivity' and 'Diversity' versus the Crafted Christian Concepts of Catholicity and Created Differentiation", pp. 151-167.

³³ It is worth noting that marriage features at the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 1 and 2) and at the end of the Bible (Revelation 21 and 22). *Is this significant for theology of marriage?*

³⁴ See further in Tim Harris' paper at this conference, "Explorations in a Theology of Marriage – International Perspectives."

³⁵ Given that the advancement of a theology of evolutionary marriage in the life of the church is a *revolutionary* development I set down a few further weaknesses, the resolution of which is a significant challenge to overcome: (a) that it weakens the rationale for marriage to be about only two people. On what grounds does evolutionary marriage rule out either polygamy/polyandry or incest? (b) that it constrains advocacy of the importance of both a mother and a father being parents of children (c) that it yields to science and to sociology an authority in determining theological ethics at variance with the authority of God's revelation through Scripture to humanity.

³⁶ I heard this myself. It is reported at <http://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/News/Common-Life/hui-closer>

³⁷ Various things being equal such as parents willingness to receive instruction, have the baptism undertaken at an appropriate place, time and occasion.

³⁸ In Anglican terms baptism is a *sacrament* (one of two dominical sacraments) and marriage is a *sacramental action* (see NZPB, p. 934, with some Anglicans accepting that marriage is a sacrament, one of the five sacraments additional to the dominical sacraments, as understood in the Roman church). Here I am not wishing to engage in debate over sacrament versus sacramental action but I hope that 'sacramental action' might be accepted as an inclusive phrase in the present writing.

³⁹ I am well aware that there have been a few Anglican clergy who have refused to perform infant baptisms. In my experience it is a very few. Further, the question of whether one is willing to perform infant baptisms or not is likely to be a question examined in the journey towards ordination and thus the answer given can be determinative of whether ordination will proceed or not. I have never heard of a Baptist pastor performing infant baptisms. I suspect there may be denominations in which the option of baptising infants or not may be exercised, but I am not familiar with them.