

My Notes on  
**“This Holy Estate”**  
The Report of the Commission on the Marriage Canon of  
The Anglican Church of Canada  
September 2015

- prepared by Chris Smith, Aug 2016

These are my notes of this report on gay marriage, section by section, and will sometimes include my interpretations or comments. Anyone interested in this issue should read the report in its entirety, but this does give a general overview.

1. Introduction

- This really doesn't say anything important

2. Consultation

- It is IMPORTANT to note that the purpose of this commission was NOT an impartial study of same sex marriage. “The commission’s mandated task was to bring to the 2016 General Synod particular proposed amendments to the canon on marriage, along with background and rationale...” In other words, the mandate was biased from the beginning and the purpose was to justify it
- This section talks mostly about what various groups think of us changing the canon. To summarize:
  - o The Lutherans like it, the United Church likes it, Integrity Canada (gay organization) likes it
  - o The Inter-Anglican Standing Commission thinks changing the canon “would cause great distress for the communion as a whole.” They favour a “local option” policy (like the Lutherans), which means that each pastor and congregation can do what they want and turn a blind eye to what other congregations are doing
  - o Integrity Canada, while they support a change to the canon, says that individual pastors should be allowed to act on their conscience (but you know that won't last because what the church is actually teaching is that it is okay)
  - o The Indigenous bishops don't like it, but they probably won't do anything about it but “continue in a spirit of reconciliation and conversation...”
  - o The Anglican Church worldwide and the Catholic church in Canada won't like it and it will hurt our relationship with them, but this doesn't seem to be a concern

(They keep using the word discernment in a manner that seems to me like Joseph Smith and his various revelations.)

3. Solemn Declaration

- This is an 1893 one pager that established the Anglican church in Canada

- The conclusion of this study is that changing the canon *does not directly contravene the Solemn Declaration* (in other words, it does, but they can find a way to rationalize it)
- In this section, the writers spend a lot of time talking about the word “harmony,” arguing that harmony can still include “tensions and dissonance.”
- Note that the word “harmony” is not in the Solemn Declaration. What the Solemn Declaration says is that the church in Canada “...shall continue, IN FULL COMMUNION with the Church of England throughout the world...” and that we will teach “the same Word of God; partake of the same Divinely ordained Sacraments, etc.” The words “the same” are used a lot.
- They also point out that the church in Canada previously differed in areas such as divorce and re-marriage, ordination of women, and the Book of Alternative Service. Although this is a better argument, it may be that we erred in the past in not working within the larger Anglican communion.

#### 4. Conscience Clause

- The 2013 General Synod resolution also said the new canon should include a conscience clause for priests who refuse to participate in same sex marriage. However, the authors warn that “there is a significant risk” or “a challenge under provincial human rights legislation, the Charter, or both” (although they don’t think it would be successful).

#### 5. Biblical and Theological Rationale

This is a big section, so I will sub-divide it into the major sections. The section as a whole gives convoluted arguments using theological jargon in an attempt to rationalize same sex marriage; however, NO BIBLICAL EVIDENCE is given to lay aside the fact that the bible says homosexual behaviour is wrong or to justify same-sex marriage. In fact, at one point, they say “it may be this account of human sexuality [creation story in Genesis] is incomplete, that it needs to be supplemented by also understanding homosexual orientation as part of God’s good created order.” In other words, the word of God is incomplete, so we should supplement it to say what we want. (I think the bible says something about people adding to it.)

##### 5.1 Our Starting Point

Sets the foundation, including authority of scripture, definition of marriage, current situation with respect to homosexual members of the Anglican church of Canada.

- **The Authority of Scripture** section dismissively mentions the “six texts condemning same sex activity;” however, it never identifies them or explains why they don’t apply except for Romans. For the record, they are: Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1: 26-27, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:10. (There are arguments out there that supporters of homosexuality use to dismiss these texts, but this report does not give any.) Another relevant text is the creation story, which the report does address.

- That makes seven texts, but there are more. For example, 1 Kings 14: 24, Job 36:14, and Deuteronomy 23:17. Some of these passages place homosexuality in the context of pagan worship of which it was often a part. The majority of the scripture condemning sexual impurity is ignored in this report.
- The authority of scripture section also says that the report takes “an Anglican way of reading the Bible that provides a true middle way...,” recognizing the fundamental importance of scripture but also that scripture “marks the church as a community continually shaped by God’s revelation. This “middle way” is based on the St. Michael Report, another Canadian Anglican report in support of same sex marriage, which says that “we all read and interpret the Scriptures through the eyes and understandings of our own cultures.” So, basically, it’s a moral relativity approach, saying that the bible doesn’t say what it says and it depends on the values of the culture in which we read it. Similarly, the authors of “This Holy Estate” say that “while Scripture bears the final authority for the church, it does not do so apart from interpretation and application.” While these things are both true to some extent, it doesn’t mean that you can just interpret it to mean whatever are the social values of the day. In fact, if you look at the Old Testament, there are lots of times when social values did not reflect God’s values and He wasn’t impressed.
  - **Definition of marriage** – this section just gives the current definition and vows from the Anglican church
  - **The Anglican Church of Canada and its Homosexual members** – this I did not know. In 2004, the General Synod affirmed “the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships.” Also, many dioceses in Canada currently allow the blessing of same-sex civil unions. If I had known this, I would have stopped being an Anglican back then.

## 5.2 Aspects of a Theology of Marriage

- This section begins by **distinguishing between civil and theological marriage**, but gives no biblical or theological argument for same-sex marriage
- **Sexual duality** – This subsection starts with the admission that “Marriage in all cultures has traditionally been between man and woman...” In other words, never in the history of the world has any culture had homosexual marriage. The rest goes on to say things that are unsupported, unrealized, or irrelevant. For example, at one point they say “To answer this question we must turn to Scripture,” but then they don’t. In another place they say, “Gender diversity was created by God, who cannot be defined in terms of either gender or by the genders in relation to each other through marriage.” What does this have to do with anything? Certainly, nothing in support of their argument.
- **Marriage and the Creation Accounts** – This subsection looks at both the old and new testaments. In examining the Old Testament, they say a lot that sounds scholarly but that provides no evidence to support same sex marriage or homosexual behaviour. For example, they say that God created them male

- and female and told them to be fruitful and multiply. Then they argue that “there is no explicit reference to marriage (nor to family) as a necessary agent of procreation.” So what? They go on to say that the verse “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother...” doesn’t say anything about procreation, so homosexuality must be okay if procreation isn’t the basis of marriage and companionship is. However, that text continues by saying “...and cleave to his wife,” so I guess their argument is wrong. They also argue that in Israel, the custom was actually for the woman to leave, so marriage conventions can change. That’s pretty weak.
- Marriage and the creation accounts – in the New Testament part, again they say scholarly things and refer to the bible, but not in a way that provides any evidence to support their position. For example, they refer to the passage where Jesus says that God only said divorce was okay in cases of infidelity because of the hardness of people’s hearts. What does that have to do with anything? Then, I’m not sure, but I think they say that in the new creation, people will no longer be male and female. No conclusions are drawn, but the implication is that the two becoming one flesh, therefore, doesn’t have to be between a man and a woman. Honestly, there is nothing here of any weight.
  - **Romans 1 and the Question of Natural Law** – here they address one of those 6 texts, Romans 1:26-27. They make three points: 1. The “it’s not natural” sentiment reflects people’s gut-level revulsion to something that same-sex attracted people find natural. 2. Contrary to nature is not synonymous with sin. 3. Paul’s concern in the passage is not sexuality, but self-righteousness. I think the verses should be read in context of the whole chapter and chapters 2 & 3. I have no idea about point 1. It’s not an issue of biblical interpretation. With respect to point 2, verse 24 says, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity...” It’s pretty clearly talking about sin. With respect to point 3, yes, chapter two warns about being judgmental. Let’s look at the whole thing. Chapter 1 in verse 8 begins the discussion saying that Paul thanks God because the faith of the people he is writing to is known all over the world. Then he goes on to talk about God’s wrath against people who know God but “suppress the truth by their wickedness” and their sinful desires and sexual impurity. Then chapter 2 warns against passing judgment because (as it goes on to say in chapter 3) no one is righteous, leading up to “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” None of this means that the things described as sinful desires and sexual impurity are not.
  - **Marriage as covenant** – This is all fine, but again it provides no scriptural support for a marriage covenant between the same gender
  - **The marriage vows** – This quotes the declaration of intent and the marriage vows and then asks: Should the church include same sex couples in covenantal language? Can the church forbid same sex couples from making this commitment? If same sex couples used covenantal vows, would they mean it as much as heterosexuals? If same sex blessings are called something other than marriage, does that mean they are theologically different? This is

- an attempt to play on people's emotions, but gives no theological or biblical support in support of same-sex marriage or homosexual behaviour.
- **The purposes of marriage** – This subsection is further subdivided into the three purposes in the wedding ceremony: companionship and support, sexuality, and procreation. 1. Companionship and support, they say, can be found just as much among same sex couples as opposite sex couples (I think among members of the same gender, it's called friendship). In fact, they say that same-sex couples may be "ahead of the majority population in exploring the longevity and sustainability of desire and tenderness" implying that their marriages are actually better. They also argue that changes in traditional gender roles mean that gender isn't important in marriage. Everything in this subsection is unsupported opinion and has no biblical or theological foundation. 2. Procreation, they say, is not a condition of marriage and people can always adopt. Furthermore, they say that the procreative purpose of marriage just means caring for others outside their relationship. I don't know that procreative purpose can be defined that way. Certainly, caring about others is always admirable, but that isn't unique to married people. 3. Sexuality. Here they say that homosexuals have the same need for physical tenderness, but a profound orientation toward their own gender. Again, this is not a biblical or theological argument supporting homosexual behaviour, nor does it give a biblical foundation to dispute the passages that say homosexual behaviour is one of the sexual things we are not supposed to do.
  - **Marriage as a Sacrament** – Apparently, baptism and the Eucharist are the sacraments of the Gospel and the others, including marriage, are great mysteries, i.e. in the same way that Christ became one flesh with the church, husband and wife become one flesh in marriage. I don't know, but anyway, they conclude by saying: "Do we recognize within same-sex covenants the same 'great mystery'? Or are there grounds to argue that same-sex unions cannot reflect the love of Christ for the church in the same way...?" Well, yes because homosexual behaviour is a sin, like adultery and sometimes divorce and other things that can mean you aren't allowed to marry in a church. Again, this is an emotional human argument couched in church jargon, but with no biblical support for the conclusions they want us to draw.

### 5.3 Models for Understanding Same-Sex Marriage

This section explores whether same sex couples should be married in the same way as heterosexual couples or blessed as partnerships or what. The clearly prefer an undifferentiated approach, but as nothing scriptural has been presented that suggests in any way that homosexuality is not a sin, this section has no foundation.

- **Same-Sex Marriage as an Undifferentiated Form of Christian Marriage** –expanding the existing canon with "gender-inclusive terminology." They favour this because of its simplicity and because it avoids an equal, but not equal separate option. They also say there is a redemptive value to marriage because married couples, whether gay or not, enter into Christian community together. So does that mean anybody who is married in a church

- is redeemed? How anyone is redeemed while remaining in sin and without repentance or forgiveness, I don't get. I think they are taking an existing idea and stretching it into a context where it doesn't fit.
- They go on to say that having the same marriage for homosexuals could challenge the traditional understanding of marriage in terms of the order of creation, i.e. heterosexual love that starts with the creation in Genesis and runs throughout the scriptures. They say, "It may be that this account of human sexuality is incomplete, that it needs to be supplemented by also understanding homosexual orientation as part of God's good created order." So much for biblical and theological rationale. The bible isn't complete so we need to supplement it. They end by saying we should celebrate heterosexual love as a gift of God and homosexual love as a gift of God as well, although no biblical reason is given to support this.
  - **Same-Sex Marriage as Blessed Partnerships** – This approach is just a blessing of a same sex civil union. The disadvantage is that it denies "homosexual couples the 'sacramental' significance of marriage."
  - **Same-Sex Covenants as a Differentiated form of Christian Marriage Covenant** – They really don't talk about this. Instead, they say that same sex marriage is just as good as heterosexual marriage although it is neither identical to nor different from heterosexual marriage. (No biblical rationale given.) Then they go on to argue that same-sex couples can be adopted into the covenant of marriage in the same way that gentiles were included in the original covenant with Israel. This is apples and oranges, but it is a common argument made in church circles. It then compares homosexuals having sex in a different way from heterosexuals to gentiles not being bound by the Torah. This is an absurd application of discussions in the New Testament about gentiles becoming part of the New Covenant without first having to become Jewish. The problem with this line of reasoning, like much in the report, is that it can be used to justify anything.

#### 5.4 A Biblical and Theological Rationale for Same Sex Marriage: Conclusion

This doesn't add anything much. It just says that they have attempted "to show how it is theologically possible to extend the marriage canon to include same sex couples..." in other words, to theologically justify the unjustifiable.

#### My Conclusions

- The report "This Holy Estate" was not an impartial study, but an attempt to rationalize theologically the social agenda to legitimize same sex marriage.
- Although the report does present theological arguments, no biblical evidence is given to show that homosexual behaviour is not a sin or that same-sex marriage is okay. This is why they eventually conclude that the Bible must be incomplete and need supplementing. In fact, all the report does accomplish from a biblical perspective is to prove that homosexual behaviour is a sin

- The arguments that are used in this report to justify homosexual marriage could be used to justify anything.
- Although modifying the canon seems an outright breach of the Solemn Declaration, it may not be. The Scottish Episcopal Church voted in June 2016 to change their canon. Looking at international reports, such as Lambeth 2008, there is a lot of talk about homosexuality and studying the bible more fully on this issue. I don't know why since it's very clear. Lambeth 1998 seems more scriptural which, "while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;" It also does NOT advise the legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions. In the appendix, a resolution from East and Central Africa notes "the Holy Scriptures are clear in teaching that all sexual promiscuity is a sin, is convinced that this includes homosexual practices, between persons of the same sex, as well as heterosexual relationships outside marriage." I think one reason we are where we are now is that we have stopped teaching about sexual sin generally. I expect there will be increasing division internationally.
- Perhaps the most enlightening part of the report is a quote on the first page in which someone says, "I feel caught between God and neighbour. If I support the existing canon, I risk stopping my ears to the voices of some of our LGBTQ siblings in the Lord. I take that to be a serious thing. But if I support a change to the canon, I risk stopping my ears to the voice of God as the church has heard it in the Scriptures." So, it seems we have to choose. We can either love God first and serve others in his name, or we can love people first and serve God in theirs.
- I love the Anglican Church and particularly my congregation of good faithful people. Furthermore, I know that they love me because in the times when I have messed up in my life, they have loved me unconditionally while still holding to the truth of God's word. However, I love God more. If no change is made to the current direction, I, at least, will have to leave. It boils down to Matthew 18:6 where Christ says, "If anyone causes one of these little ones--those who believe in me--to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." I can't be part of a church that misleads the people and teaches lies.