

features, they offer great diversity for the ways in which marriage may be celebrated liturgically. Whatever the shifting contexts, we use numerous employed so that day, without a se who have a ngstanding de i marriages? Is vil ceremony? iving away' of , conducted by panns, confetti, hese questions, hesh the church ular question s man and this , and with the social context of today's Australia in mind, that the following Guidelines have been formulated.

From
 A Pastoral Handbook
 for Anglicans by
 Charles Sherbock
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 An Australian book but
 used widely in NZ.

B Marriage: Theological Dimensions

B1 What is marriage?

The prevalence of marriage in all societies means that we tend to assume that we know what we mean by it. Yet marriage customs and family relationships vary widely across societies and cultures (consider the differences among indigenous and immigrant Australians, for example). Until recently a substantial consensus as to what marriage was prevailed across Western societies, especially in Europe and the USA. Various roles and rights, or lack thereof, were assigned in law to the partners, but out of a growing and changing tradition and historical reality, rather than on the basis of a settled definition.

Surprisingly little theological discussion has taken place as to what marriage actually is. The *Book of Common Prayer*, for example, does give reasons 'as to why matrimony was ordained': procreation, control of sexuality, and companionship. While it is true that these are reasons, causes or purposes for marriage, they do not constitute a definition, nor do they provide the basis for a clear liturgical shape for a wedding. Considerable effort has been put into understanding what marriage is not, when a marriage has broken down, and the consequences of this.

The present situation (in urban Australian society at least) where marriage is not universally accepted, is of very recent origin. There is thus a pressing need in our day for substantial theological discussion concerning marriage, not least to foster appropriate discernment in the variety of pastoral situations encountered in Christian ministry. What follows outlines a contemporary ecumenical approach.

B1.1 Scriptural foundations

Christians have looked to Genesis 2, especially verses 18-24, as the scriptural basis for marriage. The classical 'conditions' for a marriage to be valid derive from the concluding verse 24: a 'leaving' of the household (the founding of a new family unit), a 'cleaving' of the partners (the free, exclusive choice), and 'becoming one flesh' (sexual union as the unitive seal of marriage). The biblical term for such a partnership is 'covenant', an idea which includes the notion of

contract but also transcends it, as having an enduring, personal and communal character, marked by love-in-action more than duty.

This basis is not as obvious as it might at first sight appear, however. No wedding ceremony is mentioned in Genesis 2, and the context is the creation of the human race as a whole, more than merely the story of the first two members of it. According to the scriptures, Jesus only offered teaching about marriage in response to trick questioning about divorce. The teaching he does give, however, is based on Genesis 1-2 (Mark 10:6-8). It is significant that he moves from Genesis 1:27 straight on to Genesis 2:24, passing over the intervening verses which concern the making of the woman (see below).⁷ Jesus thus avoids the possible implication that the woman is 'under' the man in creation. Instead, he appeals to the statement of the preceding chapter, 'God made them male and female, in the image of God' (Genesis 1:27), noting that this was the divine intention 'from the beginning'. Thus for Jesus, marriage was based in the partnership of male and female, expressing one aspect of what it means to be 'made in the image of God'.

The distinctive relationship of man and woman, which Christians describe as 'marriage', is set against the background of God's creative work. The unity of man and woman in the completeness of their new life together reflects one aspect of humanity as being 'made in the image of God', as male and female (cf. Genesis 1:26-28). This notion is not merely individual, for we are made in the image of God as a race of like-yet-unlike, male-and-female. Humankind is directed to be 'fruitful' (1:29-31), not only in the bearing of children, but in contributing to the creative development of human society. Marriage thus belongs to the order of creation, in which human faithfulness mirrors the faithfulness of God, in whose image we are made.⁸

7 Note that Genesis 2:24 itself overturns patriarchal notions of family structure, describing the man as 'leaving' his familial household to 'cleave' to his woman.

8 The cultures in which Genesis is set were dominated by fertility religions, in which sex was both celebrated as the symbol of life, and feared because of the uncontrollable passion aroused and released. Sexual relations between the gods and human beings formed elements in the mythology of both Canaan and the Gracco-Roman worlds. The scriptures paint a very different picture: sexuality is 'demythologised', yet honoured as expressing a fundamental element in what it means to be human. God, though revealed as expressing a fundamental and the source of all fruitfulness, is never spoken of in sexual terms.

Genesis 2 then explicates this 'image', literally from the ground up: we are 'earthlings' ('adam) from 'earth' ('adamah), then living beings (2:7), having a task over creation (2:8-9, 15). Note that verses 15-18 do not refer to 'one male human', so much as 'humanity as a whole' ('adam). It is 'not good that humanity should be solitary' (2:18). No companionship amongst the animals is found, so humankind is divided, and the outcome - 'woman' ('ishshah) and 'man' ('ish) (2:23) - is acknowledged as being truly one, yet different. Genesis 2:24, the text on which scriptural teaching on marriage is grounded, concludes a closely-textured discussion of what it means to be made in the image of God, and needs to be read in such a context.

Whatever the scriptural ideals may be, marriage as we have received it is marred, as is clearly recognised in Genesis 3. The first relationship broken after disobedience is between the man and woman, who hide themselves from each other by becoming clothed (3:7). Nothing is said about the first sin being particularly related to sex. This is a misunderstanding that supports the false idea that sexual sin is worse than others, although one of its consequences is shame, while blame rather than trust characterises the attitudes of the woman and man to each other (3:12). Pain, domination and toil result in their dominion and multiplying functions (3:15-19).

Thus marriage as we experience it may reflect the interests of only one partner, be abused in the power struggles which characterise sinful humanity, or become an instrument of social control or oppression. In our own day, marriage has become increasingly privatised, losing its wider communal setting and purpose, and turning inward upon itself. The element of commitment therefore needs particular stress in the world in which we live. When pursued as an end in itself, marriage can become an idol, the dominant thing in a person's life, transcending even what God demands. Marriage thus calls for our 'penultimate' rather than our 'ultimate' allegiance, which belongs to God alone.

B1.2 New Testament teaching

Jesus gave little direct teaching about marriage, and is depicted in the scriptures as an unmarried man. When pressed with questions about

divorce, he turned these questions back to his listeners, and directed them to reflect on the ideals of Genesis 1—2 and the original goals of marriage (Matthew 19:1-15; Mark 10:1-12). These ideals were seen to be so demanding that they invited the disciples' comment, 'then it is better not to marry!' Jesus bore great respect for marriage, but called his disciples into a wider 'family / household' (*oikumenē*), that of the 'reign of God'.⁹ So, responding to a ridiculous case brought by Sadducees to trap him, Jesus taught that 'in the resurrection in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels' (Mark 12:25). The *BCP*, in describing marriage as 'a holy estate [which] Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee' (cf. John 2:1-11), points to the truth that marriage itself is blessed by Christ, not only marriages between Christians. Thus, according to the traditions about Jesus received and passed on in the early Christian communities, marriage (and kinship) were to be honoured, but not given ultimate honour (cf. Luke 2:41ff, Mark 3:31ff.).

Pauline teaching on marriage is likewise only given in response to questions raised by his readers. Consistent with Jesus' teaching, he holds that marriage, though important in this age, is not of eternal significance. One misunderstanding of his teaching is that people are 'called' to marry (or not), so that young people should look out for 'Mr / Miss Right'. The New Testament speaks of our Christian 'calling' only in terms of being called to be in Christ, not as any particular lifestyle within that. As regards marriage, Paul — mindful of 'the impending crisis' — tells his readers in 1 Corinthians 7 to remain 'in the state in which you were called', with no encouragement to seek marriage, except to avoid immorality. This teaching about marriage assumes that it is a possible lifestyle for a Christian, with Paul giving advice of a practical nature, distinguishing his own opinion from what is 'of the Lord'.¹⁰

9 The closest terms to the English word 'family' in Hebrew (*misipai* — 'clan') and Greek (*oikumenē* — 'household') refer to what we would describe as 'extended' groups, both blood relations and others being included.

10 This teaching is given along with similar practical advice about slavery, which cannot be regarded as legitimated by the scriptures (cf. Ephesians 5:21—6:9; Colossians 3:18—4:1; 1 Peter 2:13—3:7; 1 Timothy 5:1—6:2).

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More positively, in Ephesians 5 the union of man and woman in Christ is described as displaying the faithful love and service of God in Christ through the Church, described as the bride of Christ (5:21-33). Marriage, which (in traditional terminology) belongs to the 'order of creation', can thus point beyond this to the 'order of redemption', reflecting the 'great mystery' of the intimate relation between Christ and the Church. In Christ, therefore, marriage can serve as a practical bridge between faith and life.

B1.3 Some pastoral corollaries

a) Relationships beyond marriage

The goodness of close mono-gendered relationships (man and man, woman and woman) is not excluded by the scriptural teaching, nor are hetero-gendered ones (man and woman). Friendship between all sorts of people is regarded as of the highest significance in the scriptures. One corollary of the teaching of Genesis 1—2, however, is that sexual intimacy is given its appropriate context in the exclusive, one-flesh covenantal relationship of one man and one woman. Close friendships are not marriage. There can be personal communion without sexual intercourse, and sexual union without personal relationship. Gender and sexuality are broader and deeper than explicit sexual activity, which pastoral ministry needs to recognise.

b) The status of the unmarried

Each person is fully human, married or not. The description in Genesis 1—2 of being 'made in the image of God' as male and female, and the commands about fruitfulness and obedience, apply to the human race as a whole, not to the married alone. For most people today, more years are lived outside the state of marriage than within it. Overemphasis on the importance of marriage and family, can bring about false views of what constitutes worthwhile and productive human life. This can be most unhelpful for those who do not marry, or those who are not now married, whether widowed, or single again through separation or divorce.

c) Marriage and children

Humanity as a whole is told to 'be fruitful and multiply' in Genesis

1:28, yet children are not mentioned in Genesis 2. They are a consequence of the 'one-flesh' relationship, but not constitutive of it. The Psalmist portrays children as an added gift of the Lord (Psalm 127:3). 'Fruitful multiplying' may be one purpose of marriage in Genesis, but is not part of its defining characteristics. 'Fruitfulness' is intended to touch every aspect of the couple's life together (cf. B1.1).

It is in this context that family planning needs to be considered. Differences on this matter exist between the various churches, notably between Roman Catholics and others. The *Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* summed these up as follows:

Anglicans understand the good of procreation to be a norm governing the married relationship as a whole. Roman Catholic teaching, on the other hand, requires that each and every act of intercourse should be 'open to procreation'.¹¹

A related issue is the counsel given to couples unable to bear children. Undue pressure is sometimes placed on couples to use every possible method in order to conceive a child. Regarding couples without children as living an 'incomplete' marriage undermines its nature and may harm the couple's relationship.

On the other hand, a considered decision by a Christian couple not to be open to the gift of children would seem to constitute denial (in

¹¹ *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church* (Church House / Catholic Truth Society, 1994) #80. This continues:

'Both our traditions agree that [the moral integrity of the act of sexual intercourse] involves the two basic 'goods' of marriage: loving union and procreation. Moral integrity requires that husband and wife respect both these goods together. For Anglicans it is sufficient that this respect should characterise the married relationship as a whole; whereas for Roman Catholics it must characterise each act of sexual intercourse. Anglicans understand the moral principles to be that procreation should not arbitrarily be excluded from the continuing relationship, whereas Roman Catholics hold that there is an unbreakable connexion, willed by God, between the two 'goods' of marriage and the corresponding meanings of marital relationship, and that therefore they may not be sundered by any direct and deliberate act.'

It is important to note that ARCIC concludes that such a difference does not lie in the area of 'fundamental moral values' or 'fundamental teaching concerning the mystery of human life and the sanctity of the human person', but 'on their implementation in practical judgements'. Continued breach of communion between Anglican and Roman Catholics on these grounds alone is therefore not justifiable.

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the words of ARCIC) 'of one of the divinely intended "goods" of marriage ... and a contradiction of the nature of marriage itself. On this we [Anglicans and Roman Catholics] agree.'¹²

* * *

In sum, the scriptures present marriage as grounded in what it means to be human. According to Christian teaching, marriage is the one-flesh, life-long covenantal relationship of a man and woman in an exclusive commitment, as the foundation of a new kinship unit.¹³ It has been distorted by sin, and it is not of ultimate importance, but is to be welcomed and honoured among all. In Christ, marriage points to a deeper significance, showing visibly something of the love and unity between God and the church.

B2 What makes a marriage Christian?

The preceding section points to the profound Christian significance of marriage, whoever the partners may be. Marriage between Christians is often spoken of as 'Christian marriage'. Since this term might suggest that it is a distinctive kind of marriage, different to marriage generally, it is avoided in this Handbook.

B2.1 The distinctive significance of marriage in Christ

Marriage between Christians does have a distinctive significance. Marriage 'in Christ' is at least a marriage as described in the preceding section, and so assumes that the couple is committed to a life-long, exclusive, one-flesh relationship. But other factors are also involved:

1. **Marriage is not the only state of life in which a Christian may live, but is to be entered 'soberly, having in mind those purposes for which [it] was ordained', as BCP puts it. A Christian disciple enters marriage in Christ as an act of costly obedience to what he or she**

¹² Life in Christ #78. The text continues, 'We are likewise at one in opposing what has been called a 'contractive mentality', that is, a selfish preference for immediate satisfaction over the more demanding good of loving and raising a family.'

¹³ This is not inconsistent with the definition in Australian law of marriage as 'the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life' [Section 43(a) of the Family Law Act, 1975, and Section 46(1) of the Marriage Act 1961].

understands to be God's will and gift for them. Marriage in Christ forms a partnership between 'joint heirs of the grace of life' (1 Peter 3:7), characterised by common prayer and witness, and a willingness to bear the life-long costs which such commitment entails. Sexual relations are not seen as 'unspiritual', but form an important dimension of marriage in Christ, characterised by mutual concern for one another, without abuse or 'rule' of each other (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:3-7). The New Testament writers are realistic about marriage as Christians experience it, recognising that marriages in which one partner only is a believer are of special concern in the churches (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, 1 Peter 3:1-6). Further, marriage in Christ may be ended, yet only as a last resort (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Disagreement exists in the churches as to whether a divorced Christian is free to marry another.

2. Marriage in Christ is a sign of the unity between Christ and the Church, the 'bride without spot or wrinkle' (Ephesians 5:31-33). In Christ, marriage does not exist for its own sake, but as a sign in this 'covenant' between two human beings who happen to be Christians but is also a sign of the 'new covenant' to which they belong in Christ, an anticipation of the coming 'marriage supper of the Lamb' to which all humankind is invited. Marriage in Christ thus points outwards and forwards, as well as inwards and backwards. It makes visible the love of God in Christ in creation, redemption and consummation.

3. Marriage in Christ is not a private but a communal matter, lived out within the people of God, and the wider human community. It is a relationship in which the couple mutually develop and enable their gifts for the service of God. Since marriage in Christ belongs to the 'orders' of creation and redemption, such ministry extends to the wider community and world. As the Church receives the gift of the Spirit for the work of ministry, so does a marriage between Christians, seen as the church in microcosm. 'Church' wedding thus invoke God's blessing upon the couple - symbolised in some Christian traditions by the couple being 'crowned' - so that they may be fruitful in their service. One aspect of this fruitfulness is the

task and responsibility of raising children (where given by God) in the Lord.

4. Seen in this way, marriage in Christ can be situated in a trinitarian framework: it is lived in obedience to God, signifies our relationship with Christ, and embodies the fruitful ministry of the Spirit. Yet marriage - and family - do not constitute the Christian's ultimate allegiance: this belongs to God alone, and is expressed in participation in the household of faith. Thus, while giving marriage a very high place in human priorities, in Christ it does not have ultimate standing. There are greater claims, wider callings. Marriage in Christ involves a life-long covenantal commitment 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health', which nevertheless points beyond itself to the kingdom of God.

In the light of this, in every marriage conducted under the auspices of this Diocese, one or both of the couple must be a baptised person, and signify an adult Christian faith.

B2.2 Marriage - sacrament?

Article 25 teaches that marriage is not a 'sacrament of the Gospel', since it was not ordained by Christ. Further, marriage does not proclaim the gospel of Christ crucified and risen (as do the 'gospel sacraments', baptism and eucharist). On the other hand, marriage was blessed by Christ's presence at Cana, and approved in his teaching. For Christians, it proclaims the love and faithfulness of God in Christ, and the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church. These are consequences of the Gospel, pointing to profoundly spiritual dimensions of marriage in Christ. Marriage in Christ may thus properly be termed 'sacramental'.

The BCP presents marriage as a 'holy estate [which] Christ adorned and beautified by his presence and first miracle that he wrought at Cana in Galilee'. The Anglican theological tradition thus came to regard marriage itself as blessed by Christ, rather than only marriages contracted between Christians. This interpretation lies behind the historical reality that (in the words of ARCIC) 'for many years in England after the Reformation, marriages could be solemnised only

in church. When civil marriage became possible, Anglicans recognised such marriages, too, as sacramental and graced by God.¹⁴

From these considerations it would seem that, in this context, Anglicans tend to emphasise the breadth of God's grace in creation, while Roman Catholics tend to emphasise the depth of God's grace in Christ. These emphases should be seen as complementary. Ideally, they belong together. They have, however, given rise to differing understandings of the conditions under which the sacramentality of a marriage is fulfilled.¹⁵

B2.3 *Weddings in the Church*

Marriage is to be distinguished from the wedding ceremony by which a particular marriage may begin. It is not the ceremony in isolation, but the life-long one-flesh covenant relationship of a woman and man which expresses ('sacramentally') the unity of Christ and the Church. The form of a Christian wedding needs to express a Christian understanding of marriage, but we are not given, either in scripture or early tradition, any particular form for this, and those authorised in the churches have varied considerably in history.

It is the couple who enter the marriage covenant, and so are the proper 'ministers' of the marriage. Only when abuses arose did it become necessary (in the West) for a priest to be present, to ensure that the marriage was entered freely and publicly witnessed. As time went on, the priest also came to give the 'nuptial blessing', traditionally offered by a leading member of one of the families concerned. Today the ordained minister presides not only for these reasons, but because a Christian wedding takes place as an act of divine worship, in the context of Christ's people. The one who presides in the people of God is a sign of Christ's presence among his people, and so may be termed a 'co-minister' of the marriage along

with the couple. The ordained minister's presence is a reminder and sign that the couple's promises are made in the presence of Christ, as an act of commitment by a man and woman affirmed to be joint heirs of God's grace.

Over the last century 'arranged' marriages have all but disappeared in western societies, with romantic love becoming the dominant factor in the choice of life partner. From a Christian perspective, love is a most significant factor in the ongoing life of a marriage, but not the sole factor, especially where it is wholly identified with emotional feelings.

Those with experience in marriage education find that couples need to be focussed on love as an act of will rather than emotion – indeed, some couples are relieved by this learning. In Anglican and other mainstream Christian rites, the man and woman are not asked 'do you love?' but 'will you love?' Unlikely marriages often succeed because of this realism. Marriage forms the context in which we will act out and learn our capacity for loving, rather than the culmination of a love which is already shared.

14 *Life in Christ* # 62. Earlier in this paragraph it is explained that 'the Roman Catholic tradition ... affirms that Christian marriage is a sacrament in the order of redemption, the natural sign of the human covenant having been raised by Christ to become a sign of the irrevocable covenant between himself and his Church ... When solemnised between two baptised persons marriage is an effectual sign of redeeming grace.'

15 *Life in Christ* # 62.