

DECLARATION ON MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Assembly of Confessing Congregations

November 2016

INTRODUCTION

This declaration is made in the context of heated debate in the Australian community and Christian churches, including the UCA, about the meaning of marriage; in particular, whether 'Same Sex Marriage' or 'Marriage Equality' should be approved and/or enacted in law.

The ACC remains firm in the conviction that resolutions on sexuality at the 2003, 2006 and 2015 Assemblies are heretical. However, in view of the strong push within the UCA from groups like Uniting Justice and Uniting Network, to regard 'Marriage Equality' as a matter of social justice, it is necessary to expose false arguments now being widely accepted as truth by many in the church and community in public debate.

Therefore, this paper addresses key theological issues at the heart of the debate within the UCA, disputes the way in which the debate is being framed, and affirms the ACC's conviction about marriage in a series of concise positive statements which also reject alternatives not attested by the witness of Scripture.

It also responds to frequently asked questions (FAQ) and common assumptions about 'Marriage Equality.'

Since 2004, when there was bipartisan political support to include 'man' and 'woman' in the Marriage Act, the binary nature of sexuality has been increasingly undermined. There has been a radical shift in the language used to speak about sexual relationships. While 'sex' still refers to human biology, 'gender' refers to a vast array of alternative and flexible forms of sexual expression with which men and women may choose to identify. Thus the time-honoured beliefs of Christianity, other religions and humanity are now said to be out-dated and bigoted.

This radical social agenda is prosecuted in the mainstream media and in politics, education, business, sport, religion etc. by advocates intent on destroying the so-called oppressive, hateful structures bequeathed by Western colonialism and Christian particularity. Repressive middle-class attitudes to sex and the family must be displaced by libertarian values based, not on reason or faith, but on the desire of individuals and minorities to establish their own identities. Thus, modern marriages and families must be reconstructed to meet the multiple variety and fluidity of sexual relations.

The turn to ideals which have their origin in paganism, where natural desires are to be freely expressed, and nihilism, where human existence is not grounded in any reality external to the self and its collective forms, marks a deep hostility to Christian faith and reason. It also signifies a profound shift in the concepts of freedom, equality and discrimination. Largely stripped of their relation to universal moral norms, they are now widely asserted, granted and enforced as individual rights on the basis of strongly held opinions, beliefs and desires based on the absolute acceptance of relationships which are marked by difference and mutual consent.

Departure from this totalitarian creed is now regarded as heretical. Those who, until recently, upheld almost universally accepted views about sex, marriage, family, equality and human rights, are now vilified as being unchristian, right-wing extremists, bigots and haters who must be publicly silenced and shamed by psychological and legislative means.

The current controversy over the anti-bullying campaign in public schools run by the Safe Schools Coalition Australia (SSCOA), where 'the hetero-normative' relationship between male and female is fiercely rejected and replaced by 'self chosen orientation and gender identity (SOGI), is a sign of insanity which masquerades as tolerance, acceptance and love.

Underlying these rapid changes is an androgynous¹ concept of humanity which has its roots in ancient Gnosticism² where the specific structure and purpose of our bodies is treated as relatively unimportant in relation to the spiritual essence of each individual, whether male or female or multiply gendered.³ This is matched by an antinomian concept of freedom in which love and law, contrary to their unity in Judaism and Christianity, are treated as polar opposites.⁴

The pace at which these social and ideological changes are taking place in Western societies, including Australia, has created a sense of historical inevitability. Nobody wants to be on 'the wrong side of history,' least of all a church that considers itself to be non-judgmental.

DEFINITIONS OF MARRIAGE IN STATE AND CHURCH

In view of strong support in the Australian community and the UCA to change the definition of marriage to include same-sex unions, it is necessary to be reminded of the current situation, which the ACC supports.

1. The ACC supports the Marriage Amendment Act 2004 which defines marriage as 'the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life,' and doesn't recognise 'a union solemnised in a foreign country between: (a) a man and another man; or (b) a woman and another woman'.

2. The ACC affirms the UCA declaration that 'Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and a man expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companion-ship' and that in their sexual union 'the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together; ... children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society.' (Eighth Assembly Minutes 97.31.09)⁵

¹ 'Androgyny' is from the Greek for man (aner) and woman (gyne). Today, it refers to a genderless concept of humankind in which 'male' and 'female' are thought to be interchangeable terms for describing our individual identity.

² Modern Gnostics believe that their higher spiritual nature entitles them, not to refrain from, but to indulge their bodily pleasures.

³ The debate is no longer about two forms of humanity - heterosexual and homosexual. There are now said to be multiple genders with which people identify. A post on the Tumblr website lists 112 genders and 70 orientations. 'This is an ongoing list of gender identities. If you see a gender identity with a confusing or wrong description, feel free to message us as soon as possible. Feel free to mix and match your own prefixes and suffixes to create the identity that best describes you.' (emphasis added)

⁴ Antinomians believe that, being saved by grace alone, they are free from the obligations of the moral law.

⁵ See the 'Church's understanding of all marriage,' National Working Group on Doctrine, Doc.bytes Worksheet 3: Marriage (2008).

3. The ACC agrees with the statement in the Final Report of the Assembly Task Group on Sexuality to the 1997 Assembly, referring to Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:21-32, that 'marriage is the unique sign of the unity which is promised in Christ.'

4. The ACC statements on sexuality and marriage are clearly set out in a number of documents: The Charter, The Confessing Statement, Statement on Sexuality (2006); Theological Declaration (2009); Statement by the Cross Cultural Commission (2009); Marriage (2012). On marriage they say:

'We believe that God created us as male and female to live in freedom and unity with each other by being faithful to our male or female gender (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-24).' ... 'We believe that the Church should not normalise homosexual practices within the Church by: ... ii. Solemnising or blessing homosexual unions.'⁶

'Jesus invokes neither the law nor right relationships based on love. Sexuality is set at a more basic level of human existence. ... God made humans male and female (Mark 10:8).' ... 'The sanctioning of homosexual relationships countenances another species of human being which is contrary to God's word.' ... In the New Testament, moreover, the 'one flesh unity of husband and wife' is set in the context of our redemption. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Paul sets it in relation to the Trinity: since we have been bought by the Father with a price our bodies are meant for our Lord Jesus Christ; our bodies are the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:23-33 'our unity as 'members of his body' is linked sacramentally to the bodily unity of husband and wife becoming one flesh.' Marriage is one form of discipleship to be honoured; the other is celibacy.'⁷

'Marriage is not an exclusively Christian concept. As a human experience between a man and a woman it is witnessed in all countries, and in all faiths. Nevertheless, there are many features that are common throughout time and culture. Here we speak of marriage which is understood as "the gift of God and a means of grace. In the life-long union of marriage we can know the joy of God, in whose image we are made, male and female. ... Husband and wife, in giving themselves to each other in love, reflect the love of Christ for his Church." ... (Declaration of Purpose, UCA Marriage Service, 2005)⁸

5. 'How Gnostics mimic Marriage' and 'Why gay marriage is not good for Australia' are among many articles in ACCatalyst (April 2012) which reaffirm the clear witness of Scripture to our creation as male and female and the splendour of marriage in opposition to various proposals presented to UCA National Assemblies to treat homosexual and variously gendered unions as equivalent forms of sexual expression.⁹

⁶ ACC Statement on Sexuality 2006, a. and f.

⁷ From ACC Confessing Statement, 2006

⁸ ACC Statement on Marriage, 2011

⁹ The resolution on marriage and sexuality at the Fourteenth Assembly (2015) affirmed LGBTIQ people as 'full members' of the UCA, a description not used elsewhere in the church's polity.

THEOLOGY OF SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE

In this section we explore more fully what it means to be created in the image of God, the importance of marriage and the family, and the ways in which they symbolise God's union with humanity in Christ.

MALE AND FEMALE

In accordance with the witness of Scripture to the Word of God embodied in Jesus Christ, we affirm that:

1. Human beings are created in the image of God, 'male and female God created them'.¹⁰ In Genesis the creation of male and female precedes all other characteristics of humankind, such as ethnicity, personality, individuality, language, creativity, spirituality, reason, family, community or relationships per se. It is found in the complementary unity of, and difference between, the two sexes.¹¹
2. The relation between male and female reflects the fact that the triune God, one God in three persons, wills that humans also live in community. This unique man-woman relationship is the primary form of human existence, the pre-condition of every form of relationship, and the foundation of the covenant which God has established with Israel and the Church for the salvation of the world. The unity and difference of God's relationship with humanity is signified in the unity and difference between male and female in a way that is not signified merely in the difference between individuals.
3. The Imago Dei as male and female is the precondition for the formation of the family in which fathers and mothers bear children and raise them within the covenant of grace. Adam and Eve are to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1:27). All the families of the earth shall be blessed through Abraham and Sarah.' (Gen. 12:1; 21:1f) Israel is described as God's son (Ps. 2:7). Children are gifts of God who are uniquely blessed by the birth of Jesus Christ, Son of the Father and born of Mary. In the incarnate Son, therefore, the Father reveals his purpose to bring 'many sons and daughters to glory' (Heb. 2:10).
4. The Imago Dei in humanity falls short of its perfection in Christ. It is shattered, smeared, and distorted when we make God in our own image. The catastrophic results are evident in distrust between the sexes, infidelity in marriage, conflict in families, immorality, injustice, idolatry and totalitarianism (Gen 1-11).

¹⁰ The 'image of God' - the 'Imago Dei' (Latin) - is mirrored in the creation and redemption of humankind, as affirmed in Genesis 1:26-27; Colossians 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4. It is best interpreted as a symbol of life in relationship to God and others which is splendidly modelled in the coexistence of male and female. For a brief account of ways in which the Imago Dei has been interpreted in the history of Christian theology, see D. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (2014), pages 143ff.

¹¹ We acknowledge the very small incidence of people whose biological gender is indistinct. Current research indicates that the incidence of truly intersex people is .018%, or about one in 5,000. (Leonard Sax, *Journal of Sex Research*, , 39, no3, 2002: p174-8.) For such people compassionate understanding and professional assistance is required.

5. The creation of humanity as male and female prefigures the redemption of humanity in Christ.

'The Imago Dei in the human as male and female is an image of the purpose of God's saving purpose fulfilled in Christ and His relationship with the church. Human being as male and female is thus a created sign for faith in the grace and mercy of God, and of the way all humans are intended to find their created purpose as adopted into the fellowship of the family of God by baptism into Christ.' Our gendered humanity 'images the true image of Christ which is the relationship of Christ with God's adopted sons and daughters in the fellowship of Christ's body.'¹²

Therefore, the true Imago Dei is found in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, through whom all things were created (John 1:1-4). He both reflects the glory of God and embodies the humanity for which we have been created in anticipation of our future perfection. The Word made flesh is the sign of God's union with humankind. In his incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended life, Jesus Christ the only Son of God and our Lord, is the image of God with us and the image of God in us. As true God and true human he re-affirms marriage between a man and a woman as being 'from the beginning.'

6. Marriage is the embodiment in humanity of the union of Christ with the church.

The true Imago Dei, found in Jesus Christ, also includes his complementary union with his bride the church 'which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all'. (Ephesians 1:23) In him the new heaven and new earth are embodied and pre-figured in the language of bridegroom and bride. (Ephesians 5:23-33).¹³ Marriage is a sign of the future that awaits humanity. In the New Testament, the emphasis shifts to marriage as the symbol of the eschatological kingdom of God that has come in Christ.

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, CELIBACY AND DISCIPLESHIP

Marriage is a reflection of Christ's love for us. At its foundation, marriage is not just about the bride and groom. It is about Jesus Christ and his Father's divine action in our world through the Holy Spirit. Marriage belongs to the whole story of creation and redemption. Scripture begins with the marriage of man and woman and ends with the marriage of Christ and his Bride, the church, new Adam and new Eve.

1. In the Old Testament Abraham is called to be the father of a great nation through which the covenant is revealed to 'all the families of the earth.' (Gen 12:1-3) The commandment to 'honour your father and mother' (Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16¹⁴) comes immediately after the commandments to honour the Lord your God. The importance of procreation for the covenant is emphasised in Gen. 1:26-27 which is best understood in the light of the sheer joy of marriage depicted in Gen. 2:18-25 and the Song of Songs. The vital role of bringing-up children in the 'fear of the Lord' is emphasised.

¹² G. Watson, Notes on Calvin and Barth, Lent 2006

¹³ Curiously, this passage is not included in the suggested Scripture passages to be read at weddings in the Marriage Service, Uniting in Worship 1 (1988) and 2 (2005).

¹⁴ In Lev. 19:3 the order is 'mother and father' where it is combined with keeping holy the Sabbath. See, too, Sirach 3.

2. In the New Testament, the procreative purpose of marriage is less prominent.¹⁵ Marriage between a man and a woman is re-affirmed, children are icons of the kingdom of God (Mk 10:1-13),¹⁶ the authority of 'the law and the prophets' is upheld,¹⁷ and love and fidelity between husbands and wives is supported.¹⁸ At the same time, the Old Testament understanding of marriage is radically modified. There is no text that regards procreation as the justification for marriage. Nor is childbirth a primary covenantal virtue because the one covenant between God and humankind has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ for both Jew and Gentile.

3. Therefore, the family is a penultimate reality. In Judaism the family unit is a God-given entity composed of father, mother and their children whose primary responsibility is to be faithful to the family of Abraham. The Christian family takes up this task within the wider family of God on earth, thus pointing to our true and heavenly home.¹⁹ It recognises that, ultimately, we are sons and daughters of the Father of Jesus Christ.²⁰ Jesus models this dual reality and task by obeying his parents in his 'Father's house'.²¹

This also highlights the fact that family loyalties and loyalty to the family of God will come into conflict. Jesus makes it clear that natural family ties are important and are to be honoured, but they are not absolute. They can become obstacles to Christian discipleship. 'And pointing to the disciples, Jesus said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'²² Elsewhere, with typical Semitic exaggeration, Jesus stresses the urgency of the hour, when disciples must count the cost of bearing the cross: 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple'²³ At the same time, Jesus exposes false piety which avoids honouring one's parents because of devotion to God.²⁴

4. The significance of marriage between a man and a woman is deepened. It is the sign and seal of the union between a man and a woman which simultaneously signifies the union between God and Israel and Christ and the church in which humanity is sealed by grace and enabled to live in hope. The fact that wedding feasts, bridegrooms and brides figure prominently in Jesus' parables and in Revelation is a sign of the sacramental or covenantal nature of marriage and its eschatological meaning. Likewise are Jesus' reaffirmation of the sanctity of marriage (Mk 10:2-9; Gen 1:27, 2:24, 5:2), and frequent admonitions in the Epistles to resist social pressures to conform to ungodly forms of sexual practice, including homosexual practice or to break marriage vows.²⁵

¹⁵ See Paul in 1 Cor. 7; In Mt 19:10-12 eunuchs, who cannot marry or choose not to, are equal participants in the kingdom of heaven.

¹⁶ This passage, which is integral to the Proclamation of Marriage in the Marriage Service, Uniting in Worship 1 (1988), is omitted in Uniting in Worship 2 (2005). Nor is it among the suggested Scripture passages to read at the service.

¹⁷ Mt 5:17-20; Lk 18:18-26 // Mt 19:16ff // Mk 10:17ff. The Synoptic passages immediately follow Jesus blessing the children. In Mt 18:6 // Mk 9:42 Jesus sternly warns disciples against putting obstacles in the way of children.

¹⁸ Ephesians 5:23-33; 1 Cor. 7; Heb. 13:4;

¹⁹ The Holy Family - Joseph, Mary and Jesus - signify this dual reality and task. See Lk 2:41-52 where Jesus obeys his parents and is in his 'Father's house.' Note, too, references in Acts to 'natural households' being members of the 'household of faith.'

²⁰ 2 Cor. 6:16-18

²¹ Lk 2:41-52

²² Mt 12:49-50

²³ Lk 14:26-27

²⁴ Mark 7:11-13

²⁵ 1 Cor 6:9- 7:16; Heb. 13:4

Man and woman mirror God's covenantal purposes for humanity and, where married, are to be faithful to one another in the one flesh union of husband and wife. In this way they especially symbolise God's union with humanity in Christ. As John Paul II said in his 'theology of the body,'²⁶ God has inscribed in our male and female bodies a sign of the miracle of the incarnation in which those who are dissimilar, God and humankind, man and woman, are united in the closest possible bonds of love. The union that God wants to have with us is as intimate and passionate as that of husband and wife.²⁷

5. Jesus forbids divorce because marriage between a man and a woman is not primarily a legal matter, but a reality grounded in creation.²⁸

It is sometimes argued that, because some churches permit divorce, thus allowing what Jesus has forbidden in marriage between a man and a woman and what Paul allows under certain conditions, she can also make an exception in relation to 'same-gender marriage.' While neither represents God's ultimate purpose for marriage, permission is consistent with the Gospel's message of love and forgiveness.

The analogy fails because the arguments for and against divorce are based on the Genesis accounts of the creation of, and marriage between, male and female. A more suitable response to the problem of divorce and re-marriage would be to strengthen a marriage culture, not encourage a more laissez-faire approach to multiple forms of sexual relationships.

6. Marriage is not for everybody. Jesus, Paul and some disciples were single. The Ethiopian eunuch was the first non-Jew to be baptised after Pentecost. All were celibate.

Christ's approval of eunuchs as equal participants in the kingdom of heaven was radical in a society where marriage was an obligation on devout Jews and 'eunuch' was a byword of contempt for those who were excluded from Israel.²⁹ Instead of being excluded from the kingdom of God, they are free to proclaim its coming without marital ties.³⁰ Thus they foreshadow the future when God's covenant with humanity will be consummated, not through marriage and procreation between men and women, but through the marriage of Christ, the husband, to his bride, the Church.³¹

There is, therefore, no basis in Jesus' teaching about the resurrection or the place of eunuchs to find analogies for homosexual or multi-gendered sexual practices.³² In fact, it is expressly forbidden on two grounds, both of which are unambiguously attested in Scripture: the indissolubility of marriage between a man and a woman; and its alternative form of discipleship, celibacy. Nor is there any basis for assuming that friendships between Jesus and his disciples or David and Jonathan involved homosexual intimacy.

²⁶ 'Man and Woman He Created Them'

²⁷ P. Chandler, 'Marriage: a reflection of Christ's love for us,' in AD2000, June 2013, p 20

²⁸ Deut. 24:1; Mk 10:1-12 // Mt 19:1-12; Mt 5:31-32; 1 Cor. 7:10-16

²⁹ Deut. 23:1; Mt 19:10-12. 'Eunuch' refers to celibate men who had been castrated or were impotent or disinclined to marry.

³⁰ Acts 8:26-40; 1 Cor. 7:7-8

³¹ Revelation 21:2; 9-10

³² See footnote 3 above

RESPONSE TO COMMON ASSERTIONS

'Love makes a family'

In view of the prevalence in society of divorce, cohabitation, family violence, child abuse, foster care, etc., it is not surprising that the institution of marriage between a man and a woman, as well as the authority of the Christian Church to defend it, are widely held in contempt. The 'modern family' is portrayed as a household of individuals whose maleness or femaleness is irrelevant to their willingness to share each other's joys and sorrows. In relation to 'Marriage Equality' this is expressed as the right of two consenting adults, irrespective of sex, to marry and, where desired, to raise a family.

It is often said that the gender of the parents and the structure of the family are irrelevant to a healthy marriage and family life. What matters is that a couple is committed to each other for life and that their children are loved. It is asserted that abusive relationships between fathers and mothers or same-sex couples, not their gender, are the cause of marital disharmony and childhood trauma and unhappiness.

1. This Gnostic view ignores the clear purpose of the body for sexual intercourse and a societal function of parenting in teaching children to understand the subtle gender differences between men and women. Ironically, advocates of gender equality, who passionately argue that the presence of both sexes is necessary to humanise the workplace etc., see no need for it to be mirrored in the most important social unit of all, the family.

The point holds irrespective of whether children are involved. The modelling of differences between men and women in society at large is not simply a matter of equal numbers or different personalities. What is important is the social embodiment of the mysterious otherness and unity of our creation as male and female which 'same gender marriage' cannot model.

It defies logic to redefine marriage to include a relationship which, by definition, excludes one sex.

2. The assertion, that the biological difference between men and women is irrelevant to the meaning of marriage, defies logic and is socially harmful. Creating a form of marriage which precludes the possibility of children being raised by their biological parents is a violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990).

Studies also show that the absence of a biological father or mother, because of death, divorce, separation, adoption, fostering, violence, donor conception etc. is usually detrimental to the development of children's identity. Sadly, there are situations when a parent cannot be present or when children cannot live with their parents. When children are removed from their families or a parent or parents are unable to raise their children, children can still yearn for a father or mother, notwithstanding their grief and anger for previously being abused or abandoned.³³

³³ The effect of 'fatherless families' in the Afro-American communities on the unemployment and crime rate in the USA, often remarked on by President Obama, is one example of the resultant personal and social dislocation. Groups like Vanish and Tangled Webs were formed to support donor-conceived children and their parents who experience grief, anger and loss.

It defies logic to redefine marriage to include a relationship which, by definition, excludes a father or a mother.

3. Redefining marriage to exclude sexual difference, and unhinge it from its biological basis, is the final step, which started with donor conception and surrogacy, in redefining birth as essentially artificial and disconnected from the sexual act. As British theologian John Millbank says, 'The price for this severance is surely the commodification of both by the market, the quasi-eugenic control of reproduction by the state, and the corruption of the parent-child relation to one of narcissistic self-projection.'³⁴ Disconnecting the sexual act from the parent-child relation is social engineering, and has serious consequences. The meaning of sexual intimacy and family life would then be determined by adult desire and mutual consent.

It is socially unwise to redefine marriage to include a relationship which, by definition, cannot bear children.

4. The legal and administrative ramifications of redefining marriage are wide-ranging, and troubling.

Birth certificates are already being changed so that 'father' and 'mother' are replaced by 'parent one' and 'parent two' and include biological, donor, surrogate and social parents as well their sex and gender identity.³⁵ This is part of a larger shift in language to undermine the heterosexual basis of marriage, birth and family life. Terms like 'boy' and 'girl' and 'husband' and 'wife' are being rejected in favour of the 'modern family' which is portrayed in TV, film and the media as a malleable entity based entirely on the satisfaction of a person's perceived psychological, social and sexual needs and desires.

What will be the consequences of re-writing birth certificates to express a person's changed sexual orientation or preferred gender identity? What will be the consequences for tracing ancestry of not recording biological parentage on birth certificates?

Will the churches including the UCA be happy to endorse these changes?

It would be chaotic to redefine marriage, birth and parentage in law in order to embody multiple gender choices.

³⁴ On ABC Religion and Ethics, 23/4/2013

³⁵ As in the well documented case of Sir Elton John and David Furnish whose children were conceived by mixing their sperm and using the same surrogate mother.

'Love is love, fair is fair, and marriage equality is not negotiable'

This statement by Daniel Andrews, Premier of Victoria, neatly encapsulates the power, as well as the irrationality, of the 'Marriage Equality' movement. It fails to differentiate between different kinds of love and cleverly misuses the notions of 'fairness' and 'equality' to shape the entire debate.

This deceptively simple formulation of the issue hides complexities that must be brought into the open:

1. The change from 'Same-sex Marriage' (SSM) to 'Marriage Equality' (ME) is a strategic masterstroke.³⁶ It redirects public thoughts about what 'sex' may be involved in SSM, and how that might affect children, to vague concepts of love and fairness with which most tolerant citizens will readily agree.

2. The paucity of English is evident in the use of 'love' to describe different emotions and commitments.

a. Love for God isn't the same as love of animals and nature. Love between husbands and wives isn't the same as love between friends or siblings. Love between parents and children isn't the same as love of grand-parents or relatives. Love of country isn't the same as love for humanity. Sacrificial love isn't the same as loving sport, TV or hobbies. Love of enemies isn't the same as loving friends or clubs. Love that involves sexual intercourse between men and women isn't the same as sexual intimacy between same-sex couples.

Typically, Premier Andrews makes no attempt to distinguish between different forms of love. Is there a hierarchy of loves? Where, for example, does sexual love come in relation to love of God or love of enemies? Can we speak of ultimate and penultimate loves? If so, how are they related to each other?

b. This fine sounding slogan doesn't account for the fact that all our loves, no matter how attractive or consensual, can be and are often seriously misguided. There is such a thing as false love of God, spouses, children, sex, friends, country, club, nature etc., a fact borne out daily in the media.

It thereby ignores the rich variety and fragility of 'loves' which humans experience. In doing so, it assumes that all loves are true, good and right purely on the strength, feeling, emotion and conviction of individuals who consent to be 'in love.' In a postmodern world, where claims to know the truth are treated merely as power-plays, and God and universal principles of reason are both held in contempt, 'love' can be anything that defines a person's or group's self-chosen identity. The logic of this illogical world view means that we can never say that some forms of consensual love, such as sexual love between adult siblings, is wrong.

³⁶ The decision of the 2012 UCA Assembly to speak of 'Same-gender marriage,' which was ostensibly done to respect Aboriginal sensitivities, is even more problematic than 'same sex marriage.' Whilst softening the biological aspect of marriage, it is hard to see how it can be applied to marriages by LGBTIQ people. Presumably, it would mean that lesbians, for example, could only marry lesbians, not those who identify their gender differently. The use of 'Marriage Equality' hides this practical difficulty which, if ignored or blurred, will create legislative and social chaos. Regardless of the terms being used to advocate for a radical change to the meaning of marriage, it is impossible to see how bisexuals can commit themselves to an exclusive, life-long partnership with another person.

What is happening isn't new. Around 1000BC Israel's judges lamented that, 'In those days all the people did what was right in their own eyes.' (Judges 21:25) But it is 'new' in the sense that rich traditions of love which have shaped Western society for the better are now being undermined, with grave social effects.

If 'love is love' is a sufficient basis for 'same gender marriage', there can be no objection in principle to legislate for marriages which are consensually polyamorous, polygamous or incestuous. Indeed, if 'love is love' is the sole basis on which Parliament is to establish 'fairness' and 'equality' in marriage, there is no reason to restrict it to sexually active same-sex couples. It should be open to non-sexually active same-sex and opposite-sex friends, house-mates, family members et al, whose love is expressed in mutual life-long relationships.³⁷

3. There is, in fact, no inequality in arguing that marriage should be between a man and a woman. The claim that it is a hateful form of discrimination is mischievous, for the following reasons:

a. The equality of men and women in marriage is already upheld in law. To imply otherwise, by applying it to same-sex relationships, is a calculated attempt to redefine marriage in the image of two consenting adults irrespective of sex or gender. The consequence of this radical shift is to treat marriage between a man and a woman merely as one, albeit antiquated and bigoted form of coupling.

b. The existence of differences in society does not necessarily imply inequality. The fact that people under a certain age, for example, cannot marry or drive cars presupposes difference, but not unfair discrimination, from adults. They are equal in dignity but, in important respects, must be treated differently.

Similarly, with marriage. The fact that the law prescribes marriage as between a man and a woman does not infer that people who are not so married are being treated unfairly. No inequality exists for those who, for various reasons, do not marry. Single people, friends, brothers and sisters, LGBTIQ s, etc are free to shape their relationships without interference from, but subject to civil provisions of, the law. There is no discrimination where, for example, childless single people do not receive child support. The law recognises that their relationships are different from the unitive and potentially procreative relationship of marriage between a man and a woman.

c. If 'same gender marriage' becomes law on the basis that all loves are equal, then, since there is no risk of them producing offspring with genetic defects, provisions will have to be made to permit divorced men to marry their adult sons, divorced women to marry their adult daughters, adult brothers to marry adult brothers and adult sisters to marry adult sisters.

d. Indeed, it is unclear why, on the logic of the case, the demand for 'same gender marriage' is based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Non-sexualised relationships between two or more friends or family members cannot be excluded in principle.³⁸

³⁷ It is a pity that laws to register Civil Partnerships were based primarily on a person's sexual expression, not on all life-long relationships, sexual and non-sexual, in which friends and family members provided mutual support for each another. This clearly demonstrates that the goal of LGBTIQ advocacy groups is the full acceptance of homosexuality.

³⁸ The fact that civil partnership laws are based on sexual orientation, not on all mutually supportive relationships, clearly shows that the agenda of activists is not equality per se, but full legal and moral acceptance of homosexuality.

3. The social consequences of the radical linguistic shift from 'sex' to 'gender' are already clear in the heated debate over the Safe Schools Coalition (SSCOA). Once 'sex' referred to our creation as male and female and intercourse between them, and 'gender' described different social roles performed by men and women. 'Gender' came to be applied to two different forms of sexual identity - heterosexual and homosexual - which are said to characterise the creation of humankind.³⁹

Today, gender identity studies make a sharp distinction between biological sex and intercourse between the two sexes, on the one hand, and the gender with which a person identifies. Astonishingly, multifarious gender identities have now been identified, each of which is to be tolerated, affirmed and protected by the law against the bigotry of 'hetero-normativity.' As one activist puts it, the 'binary' must be smashed.⁴⁰

This radical redefinition of sex and gender involves complex psychological interactions between a person's biological gender, gender identity and gender expression. The debate has moved on. It is no longer about two forms of sexual orientation. As sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are manifold and fluid, a person's authentic sense of gender is determined by themselves. Self-definition is the sole criterion for affirming their humanity.⁴¹ That is why the rights of transgendered people are now being strongly asserted.

What, until recently, was regarded as a dysphoria, to be understood and treated with compassion, is now lauded as a natural form of gender identity to be embraced as a fundamental human right enshrined in law.

It is lunacy to radically redefine marriage when little attention is being given to the long-term social consequences of enacting laws based purely on subjective feelings and consent.

'Marriage equality is a matter of Social Justice'

This view is put consistently by Uniting Justice. It's submission to the Senate Inquiry on 'Same gender marriage' in 2012 argued that, although the UCA had not yet determined the issue, it was discriminatory for same-sex citizens to be denied the right to marry. Thus Uniting Justice advocated to change the definition of marriage in clear violation of the UCA's current doctrine of marriage.

Apart from blatantly pre-judging the issue, and intimidating dissenters, the argument is seriously flawed. The concept of social justice owes more to a Marxian view of marginalisation than to Biblical concepts of righteousness. While there is agreement that ignoring the poor and outcast is unjust, Scripture is clear that sexual (and other) practices which, in practice, deny our creation in the image of God are also unrighteous. They do not conform to what is 'holy' and 'just' for those who have been 'justified in Christ' and sanctified by the Holy spirit.

³⁹ 'The sanctioning of homosexual relationships countenances another species of human being which is contrary to God's word.' See ACC Confessing Statement, p 4

⁴⁰ Ros Ward, [any number of references]

⁴¹ See David Pohlmann, 'Gender and "Marriage Equality,"' in ACCatalyst, Vol 9 No. 7 September 2016

'Denying marriage equality to same-sex couples is akin to laws prohibiting Inter-racial Marriage'

The Civil Rights analogy fails because the two situations are not identical. In the latter, a fundamental condition for marriage, the complementary unity of male and female, is met; in the former, it is not. Thus, prohibiting inter-racial marriages is a clear violation of our creation in the image of God, as is permitting sexual relationships that are proscribed.⁴²

'Legalising 'same gender marriage' will not restrict Religious Freedom'

It is often said in support of changing the Marriage Act that, of course, exemptions will apply to religious groups on conscientious grounds. However, the experience of countries in which it has been legalised does not inspire confidence that, in the long term, the medical, educational and welfare work of dissenting communities and individuals will be tolerated.

In countries where same sex marriage laws have been enacted instances of the loss of religious freedom are very concerning. In Phoenix, Arizona, two business partners who are calligraphers each face fines of up to \$2500 and six months in jail *for each day* that they follow their religious beliefs and declined to do calligraphy for same sex weddings.⁴³

The debate about marriage in Australia (as elsewhere) has manifested a disturbing political tactic. The tactic of *ad hominem*, or attacking the person rather than debating the subject, has risen to aggressive heights. Those who disagree with 'same gender marriage' are vilified as bigoted, hateful, unjust, weirdos, morons, vile, and even 'nauseating... filth'. But the tactics have gone well beyond *ad hominem* and now include outright threats of violence, preventing meetings, the boycotting of businesses, refusal to publish, etc.

In view of the silence of the National President, State Moderators and Justice Units to publicly reaffirm the church's doctrine of marriage in the face of such unrelenting tactics, the UCA needs to seriously ask itself if this is the kind of 'justice' it is advocating, or whether there is something inherently wrong with the fundamental logic of such an 'equality' movement.

Moreover, if 'Marriage Equality' laws are passed, and the UCA resolves to regard two forms of 'marriage' or 'sacred unions' as a faithful expression of the doctrine of 'unity in diversity,' will it be possible (or legal) for the UCA to claim exemptions for ministers and congregations who dissent on conscientious grounds?

⁴² See Ryan Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, pages 123-145

⁴³ See Ryan Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, pages 105-120; David van Gend, *Stealing from a Child* pages 197-218

ACC DECLARATION ON MARRIAGE

1. We believe that God created humanity in God's image, male and female⁴⁴.

We therefore reject

- a. gender definitions that deny the binary nature of humanity as male and female,
- b. the perceived right of the individual to define their own gender identity,
- c. the claim that there are multiple genders, and
- d. individualistic and gnostic views of the human person which separate our spiritual essence from our bodily existence.⁴⁵

2. We believe in the equal dignity, honour, and worth of all persons as created in the image of God.

We therefore reject all violence, intimidation, and vilification against other people, including those whose understanding of the relationship between the sexes does not reflect the image of God, as attested in Scripture.

3. We believe that "Christian Marriage," as attested in Scripture, is ordained by God as a covenant between a man and a woman which uniquely reflects the relationship between Christ and the Church.

We therefore reject the claims that

- a. there is another form of God's 'inscrutable creative wisdom' which has been hidden until now but is openly revealed in faithful homosexual unions,⁴⁶ and
- b. relationships are 'right' when they embody forms of sexual intimacy explicitly forbidden in Scripture.

4. We continue to uphold and declare the UCA's current position on marriage as declared by the 8th National Assembly in 1997 and acknowledged by the 13th Assembly in 2012.

We are therefore disturbed by

- a. the failure of Uniting Church leaders to publicly affirm the Church's stated doctrine on marriage,
- b. actions from within the Uniting Church that undermine the Church's stated position, and
- c. attempts to silence those who uphold that position.

⁴⁴ Genesis 1:27

⁴⁵ See M. Champion, 'How Gnostics mimic Marriage'

⁴⁶ G. Thompson, 'Appealing to Scripture, Moral Formation, and Re-imagining Homosexuality,' Zadok Paper S 211 Summer 2015

5. We believe that the biblical doctrine of marriage is a matter that enters into the 'substance of the faith'.

We therefore reject

- a. the idea that adherence to the Basis of Union allows for difference of opinion on the nature of marriage,
- b. the assertion that having a 'space for grace' allows for such difference of opinion, and
- c. the misuse of 'conscience' to justify beliefs and practices contrary to Scripture.

6. We recognise that every marriage law draws boundaries that exclude some types of relationships for good public policy reasons. (e.g. Parents cannot marry their children. Brothers and sisters cannot marry. People beneath a certain age or who are already married cannot marry.)

We therefore reject

- a. the claim that limiting marriage to monogamous heterosexual couples is discriminatory.
- b. the term 'Marriage Equality' as popularly understood.

7. We believe in the intrinsic *God-given* relationship between children and their biological parents.

We therefore believe that creating a form of marriage which precludes the possibility of children being raised by their biological parents is a violation of Scripture and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990).

8. We believe that parents have an inalienable right and responsibility in raising their children which can only be relinquished in cases of family breakdown, severe illness, child abuse, gross neglect, etc.

We therefore reject any attempts by the State to override the right of parents to educate their children concerning relationships, sex, gender identity, and marriage.

9. We acknowledge that the Uniting Church 'lives within a worldwide fellowship of churches in which she will learn to sharpen her understanding of the will and purpose of God'.⁴⁷

We therefore urge the National Assembly and its Standing Committee to engage with our Australian ecumenical partners before any decisions are made that enter into the substance of the faith, e.g. by changing the doctrine of marriage.

⁴⁷ UCA Basis of Union, paragraph 11.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PRESIDENT, THE ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE, AND THE WORKING GROUP ON DOCTRINE

1. That, in view of uncertainty about the proposed plebiscite or vote in the Federal Parliament on 'same gender marriage' and the danger that the outcome could be prejudiced in advance, the President be requested:
 - a. To make a public statement reaffirming the UCA's doctrine of marriage.
 - b. To ask Uniting Justice to refrain from re-stating its opinions in its submission to the Senate committee in 2012 that denying 'Marriage Equality' for Australian citizens is discriminatory.
2. That the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) be asked to request the Working Group on Doctrine (AWGD) to prepare a substantial theological paper on Marriage and the Family, taking into account:
 - a. The significance of the *imago Dei* for the doctrine of humanity and the relation between Yahweh and Israel, Christ and the Church.
 - b. The ways in which the commandment to 'honour one's father and mother' are understood in the Old and New Covenants.
 - c. The theological work being carried out by our National Ecumenical Partners: Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, the Orthodox, Presbyterians, Baptists and Pentecostals.⁴⁸
 - d. The theological and advocacy work being carried out by groups like Family Voice, the Australian Christian Lobby, Marriage Alliance, etc.
 - e. The Manhattan Declaration.
3. That the ASC examine proposals before the Federal Parliament to change the Marriage Act to include same-sex couples, seek independent legal advice on the constitutional, legal and liturgical implications for the ongoing solemnization of marriage between a man and a woman by ordained ministers authorized as marriage celebrants by the State, and inform church members of their findings.

⁴⁸ See the strong statement in *Interchurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for Our Churches*, Report of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the UCA, 1999, pages 25-26. The parallel between 'sacrament' and 'covenant' is striking, as is the reference to Ephesians 5:21-32 and Genesis 2:24 in the Final Report of the Assembly Task Group on Sexuality (1997) which said that 'marriage is the unique sign of the unity which is promised us in Christ.'