

The Implosion of the Church

The collapse of the Uniting Church is looming. Smaller explosives, strategically detonated by church leaders over many years, have already weakened its structure. The proposal to change the doctrine of marriage augurs its implosion.

When a *Working Group on Doctrine* (WGD), entrusted to uphold the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, 'believes that definitions of marriage do not belong to the substance, or heart of the Christian faith,' any pretence to be preservers of God's Christ-embodied truth is exposed. The Report is badly researched, poorly written, and seduced by postmodern ideology.

Difference

Its doctrinal centrepiece is not the Christ who affirmed marriage (Mk 10:6-9), but the inclusive, egalitarian Jesus who broke through boundaries and accepted people in their difference. Incompatible beliefs and practices are said to be 'explicable in biblical and theological term, and can be recognised as a gift and a sign of health in the Body of Christ.' So much for the quest for truth!

The great diversity in understanding of marriage in indigenous, non-Western, and European-Australian cultures is dealt with at length, the underlying assumption being that sexual diversity is equivalent to cultural identity. It is implied that the existence of such different marriage customs justifies the acceptance of another form of diversity; namely, same-gender marriage. Cultural diversity is misused to gain support for a very different kind of 'marriage', one that, for the first time in history, is not formed by the duality and 'one flesh' union of the two sexes.

Scripture

The dismantling of the church's theological framework is clear in the Report's misuse of Scripture. It shows that orthodox plans carefully laid-out in the Basis of Union have been discarded and replaced by an alien design that 're-imagines' Scripture in ways that contradict its plain meaning. We are told that there is another way of reading Scripture that enables us to regard what seems to be 'disordered' in a new light as part of God's good, wise and greater purposes long hidden from human perception. (See 3.2.7)

This would be plausible only if Scripture hinted at such a revelation. It does not. In fact, the human significance and theological symbolism of male-female marriage is an integral part of the biblical design, from beginning to end (e.g. Gen 1&2; Song of Songs; Ephesians 5; Revelation). The duality and complementarity of man and woman 'is' the image of God (*Imago Dei*). It is not, as assumed in the Report, reflected in each individual *per se*, as if 'male' and 'female' are interchangeable terms for 'people' in general. Rather, it is reflected in their specific male-female duality and interdependence which is embodied in marriage.

Therefore, because the *Imago Dei* is not derived from our ideas about individuality, equality, and social inclusion, it cannot be generalised to include all forms of relationship. It is 'God-given,' not a reality that we construct. Nor can it be derived from the Trinity. Contrary to what is said by Dr Ji Zang, the distinctive relations within the Godhead are *not* 'the foundation of created diversity.' (p 12) The attempt to construct 'diversity' by such means founders on the rock of biblical anthropology. Scripture affirms that we have been created in the 'likeness' of God' in the specific duality and union of man and woman to uniquely embody and represent the freedom to be over against, with and for each another that is God's will for all.

Perhaps the architects of the Report are oblivious to the chasm between the *Imago Dei* and the images framed by alien postmodern concepts? Perhaps, by claiming that 'Christianity' has problematised the "two sexes, two genders" model from the beginning.' (3.3), they want to be dissociated from the doctrine of creation? They treat the God-designed limits on sexual freedom, not as liberating mandates to be enjoyed, but as rigid, outdated commandments unfit for a society that hates boundaries that stifle choice.

The Body

The Report recognises the importance of the body in marriage but is strangely coy about the nature of same-gender sexual intimacy. Talk of 'procreation,' 'children,' 'sexual union' and 'one flesh' marriage is downplayed. Other attributes of marriage, such as 'companionship,' 'encouragement' and 'fruitfulness' are rightly emphasised. As these qualities are also found among life-long friends, family members, church members etc., it is clear that same-sex sexual intimacy is the underpinning reason for same-gender marriage.

In view of this, the Report should be clear about the complex interaction of pre-natal, psychological, social, relational and volitional factors that shape same-sex attraction. The section on science (3.3, pp 35-36) is a huge disappointment. Instead of carefully weighing the vast body of evidence, while admitting that a 'gay gene' has not been found, the Report assumes that biology is determinative of gender. This is not the case, as N. & B. Whitehead's *My Genes made me do it: A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* demonstrates, together with a large number of reputable scholars.

The case for the acceptance of same-gender marriage largely rests on the assumption that same-sex attraction, like ethnicity, is innate. It is unfortunate that the difficult experiences of the small number of 'intersex' and 'transgender' people are used to reject the biblical doctrine that all people are created as male or female. In view of the decision to speak of 'same gender' not 'same sex' marriage, the Report should have been much more rigorous in setting out the relation between them.

The effect of blurring the distinction and fudging the factors involved in same-sex attraction is that the scholarly work of many theologians, exegetes, psychologists, biologists etc. have been neglected, thus giving the impression that committed same-sex couples have little or no choice. The fact that, with difficulty, many same-sex attracted people have been able to resist unwanted desires is less newsworthy than the tribulations of 'intersex' and 'transgender' people, and use-less for the purpose of bringing about radical social change.

The Family

It is disgraceful that the Report blames those who uphold the biblical doctrine of marriage for encouraging domestic violence by men! This is a serious misreading of Ephesians 5 where the emphasis is on sacrificial love between husbands and wives. And it ignores the fact that domestic violence is also a serious problem in many same-gender relationships.

There is no mention of the commandment to '*Honour your father and your mother*' (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Matt 15:4; Eph 6:1-4). Is it assumed that, in principle, children's wellbeing can best be fostered by living with any two individuals, not necessarily their biological father and mother. If so it will have ignored the evidence. As President Barak Obama famously said, the absence from the family of a father is a major cause of social breakdown. While circumstances may make it impossible for children to live with their biological father or mother or both, single and divorced parents often struggle to raise their children. And, as groups like *Tangled Webs* attest, children born with donor sperm or by surrogacy yearn to know and live with their birth parents. For all the talk about the rights of same-gender couples to marry, the inbuilt injustice done to children is ignored.

If Assembly approves same-gender marriage, it will endorse a relationship in which children cannot be raised by their biological mothers and fathers. The terms 'mother' and 'father' will become irrelevant, thus tacitly agreeing with legislative changes to Birth Certificates which recognise Parent 1 and Parent 2, describe children as Male, Female or Other, and let them to change their gender later in life. The consequences for tracing our true identity will be disastrous.

It will have rejected the unambiguous testimony of Scripture to the splendour of our creation as male and female and its consummation in 'one flesh' marriage. It would no longer be a pillar of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church 'built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ' (Basis of Union), but a schismatic church which has redesigned the plan and dismantled the structure so that it conforms to postmodern codes of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Living amid the ruins

If the doctrine of marriage is subverted at Assembly, how might evangelical, reformed, orthodox Christians live in a church whose foundations have long been sabotaged from within? Will there be a 'safe place' to affirm the truth in a church that has already collapsed and is likely to implode?

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