

THE CHURCH IN WALES AND SAME-SEX
PARTNERSHIPS

A REPORT BY THE STANDING DOCTRINAL COMMISSION OF
THE CHURCH IN WALES

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Introduction to the report

The context of same-sex partnerships has changed dramatically in recent years. For many decades there has been a debate between those who espouse the traditional line on same-sex partnerships, and those who are more affirming. However, in the last decade, two things have changed the debate a great deal. One is the reality of Government legislation, and the other is the shift in public opinion, especially among young people. Both the Church in Wales and the Church of England have sought to respond to these changes. In the Church of England, two reports were published in 2013.¹ One was on marriage, the other on sexuality. Both were the result of several years of study. So too in Wales the bishops asked the Doctrinal Commission to look at the issue of the blessing of civil partnerships in 2011. However, this study was overtaken by events. On 24 January 2013 the United Kingdom Government introduced The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill into Parliament.

The Act was granted Royal Assent on 17 July 2013. Specific legislation in the Act (Sections 4 and 8) refers to the Church in Wales. Section 4 amends the Marriage Act 1949, and allows religious organisations to opt in to performing same-sex marriages if they wish to do so, except specifically for the Church of England and Church in Wales, who are not permitted to do so.

Section 8 sets out the procedure by which the Church in Wales may opt in to performing same-sex marriages if it ever wishes to do so. The staff of the Representative Body and the Archbishop of Wales were very involved in these negotiations. As a result of these negotiations, in April 2013, the Archbishop told the Governing Body that he has asked the Doctrinal Commission “to examine the whole issue of same-sex relationships.”

We have met for six entire days as a Commission discussing this matter. We have also spent much time outside the formal meetings in personal study and writing, with many meetings between individual Commission members. We realize that this is an intensely personal issue, and we are grateful to those who were not members of the Commission who came and talked to us as a Commission for a full day. All who came spoke of their experience of same-sex attraction. Some felt that it was important that they, and the Church, resist such attraction and maintain the traditional discipline of the Church. Others had entered into civil partnerships, and one has had a child within that partnership. All were devout Christians. We have also spent much time in prayer on this issue, usually celebrating the Eucharist whenever we met. We represent very different positions within the debate. We have written a great deal, and discussed each other’s papers in a spirit of generosity and

¹ Church of England Faith and Order Commission Report 2013: ‘*Men and Women in Marriage*’. London: Church House Publishing. *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on human sexuality* GS Misc 1929 , 2013 London: Church House Publishing,

mutual respect. It has been a very intense and valuable experience for us all. I am also very grateful to St. Michael's College for their hospitality throughout, and the assistance of their staff.

The final report is quite brief, and is designed to enable discussion at the Governing Body. Our longer papers, mainly on scripture and doctrine, are on the Church in Wales' website, where those who want to pursue those arguments may do so. These papers have been seen by the whole Commission, but are the views of members themselves. There are two papers on scripture; one on sexuality and the image of God; another one on sacramentality; and lastly one on flourishing. However, we have avoided putting this argument into the report.²

The report begins by setting out the history of marriage in the West from Roman times until the legislation last year, referred to above. Next there is a brief section on the issues around same-sex partnerships raised by science. We then offer three options for discussion:

- a) marriage should be only between a man and a woman.
- b) the blessing of same-sex relationships.
- c) marriage as a union of loving equals, irrespective of sexual difference

We end our report with some considerations on the importance of a pastoral response to this entire issue. We do not weight the three options, but simply present them to the Governing Body. Some of the members of the Commission strongly insist on one option, others prefer another, and some are still undecided. All of us feel deeply that a pastoral response is imperative. We have also included three questions for Governing Body to consider as they discuss this report.

Canon Dr Peter Sedgwick

Chair, Standing Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales

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² The papers on the Church in Wales' website are as follows: Ali Green, The concept of flourishing in relation to marriage as a good, and the question of gay partnerships ; Ainsley Griffiths, Marriage as sacrament ; Matthew Hill, Fundamental scriptural approaches ; Peter Sedgwick, Sexuality and the image of God; Will Strange ,Same-sex marriage: biblical considerations.

Historical Context

1. Christianity was born in societies which already had well-established ways in which couples became married. These societies were, on the whole, very content with their customs, regarding them as the self-evident and the 'natural' way in which marriages are made.
2. Nonetheless, defining marriage is exceptionally difficult. In 1949, the noted anthropologist George Peter Murdock defined marriage as "a universal institution that involves a man and a woman living together, engaging in sexual activity and cooperating financially."³ Objections were immediately raised to this definition. In many cultures men and women, even when married, do not live or even eat together and economic cooperation is far from universal. The Royal Anthropological Institution of Great Britain tried again in 1951, defining marriage as "a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to that woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both partners."⁴ Again objections were raised: what about West African societies where a woman may have another woman as a 'female husband' and any children the first woman brings to the marriage or are subsequently born are recognized as the children of the female husband? What about ancient Rome where a newborn was presented to the husband who could then decide whether to acknowledge it as legitimate or have it exposed?
3. In early Roman society, marriage was seen as a contract between the two families. Along with the children, the wife was part of the family property. Bought from her own family for a 'bride-price', she had no property of her own and could be beaten, punished, divorced, even sold into slavery⁵ as the male head of the household saw fit. That male head was not necessarily her husband but was often her father-in-law. Roman law also presumed a couple to be husband and wife if they had lived together for a year and intended to live as husband and wife, not in a concubinage arrangement (usually those unable to marry because of different social statuses whose children would not inherit or receive citizenship automatically).
4. Underlying these ways of marriage were Roman assumptions about the nature and purpose of families. The *paterfamilias*⁶ governed a household that included slaves and the freed, clients and associates as well as children and grandchildren. This wide family provided social care,

³ Coontz, S. 2005. *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Penguin: p26

⁴ Ibid p. 27.

⁵ Coleman disputes the right to sell into slavery and notes that the *paterfamilias* was not allowed to kill her. Coleman, P. 2004. *Christian Attitude to marriage from Ancient Times to the Third Millenium*. London: SCM Press: p65

⁶ Who in some circumstances could be female

protection and economic activity. The paterfamilias had a role analogous to that of a king, with wife, children and slaves all under his rule. Coontz states that this is why male-male marriages were 'repugnant' in ancient Rome: marriage could not exist between two people who were of equal status⁷. Love between spouses occurred but had no official place in this family structure, and sexual relationships between a married man and his slaves were expected.

5. By the time of Christ, the religion of the state was largely replacing the religion of the family, so although many customs remained the same, their significance changed. A betrothal ring replaced the bride-price and it was now the couple's consent, rather than the contract of their families, which was held to be crucial. The bride did not come under the authority of the husband's family as she had before. This consent is symbolised, in Roman art at least, by the joining of right hands. There was strong social disapproval of polygamy, which was thought 'barbaric' and 'foreign', and this attitude found its way into first century Judaism and early Christianity despite the strong Old Testament examples of the patriarchs and kings. Roman divorce was easy, commonplace and carried little stigma⁸.
6. Jewish marriage, by contrast, was thought of as a two-stage process, very similar to the customs of surrounding nations. At the betrothal, the couple signalled consent by the man giving the woman a ring and claiming her as his exclusive sexual property, and the woman silently accepting it. The marriage contract specified what the bride and groom's families would give the couple and what the bride could expect in the case of divorce. At the time of Jesus, and in rural areas like Galilee, a young couple might well co-habit before the contract was signed "in order to get acquainted."⁹ The betrothal was held to be enough of a marriage that a divorce would be needed if the couple split up between betrothal and contract. Only the man, however, could initiate divorce proceedings; divorce was both easy and a source of social shame for Jewish women in a way it was not for a Roman. Rabbis Hillel and Shammai were asked what constituted adequate grounds for divorce. Shammai held that women should be divorced only for behaviour such as adultery; Hillel allowed divorce for as small an infraction as burning the husband's food. This is the context of Jesus' teaching about divorce (Matthew 19.3-12; Mark 10.2-12) in which he raises the status of the wife from disposable dependent of the man to part of his very flesh.
7. The Early Church seems to have accepted the ways of getting and being married of the society around it, but the experience of belonging to the household of faith changed the deep

⁷ Coontz 2005: p11

⁸ For example, the Empress Livia, wife of Augustus Caesar, who formulated laws to encourage and strengthen marriage, had been divorced

⁹ Coleman 2004: p86. He inverts the usual order of consent then contract, stating that it was contract then consent

assumptions about what those ways of getting married involved. In the Pauline Epistles¹⁰ *paterfamiliae* are told of their duty to love their wives and not to domineer over their children. Obedience to Christ also offered up new ways of living within the household of faith, such as celibacy and monastic community that did not depend on marriage.

8. In the Early Church, celibacy rather than marriage was seen as most the virtuous form of Christian sexuality, despite Paul's delicate attempt to assert the good of both forms of life (1 Corinthians 7). This may have had its root in the asceticism and misogyny of some forms of Greek philosophy.¹¹ The desert mothers and fathers and the founders of monasticism made celibacy the foundation of their ways of life. Without the claims of children and dependents, they were able to form communities that both replaced and critiqued the families from which they had come.
9. Celibacy was, therefore, liberating and deeply challenging to the gender roles and expectations of wider society. For the best of reasons, it allowed daughters to reject the authority of their parents, women to assume roles of leadership and scholarly excellence, men to nurse and nurture, people to express ownership of the use of their bodies and to break the expectations placed on them by their gender or sexuality.¹² It also forced the wider Church to find ways to support those whose needs were longer be automatically met by their families. It was always, however, the calling of the minority.
10. The Church's earliest statements on marriage are, by contrast, often lukewarm and mainly concern acceptable reasons for divorce and remarriage. These are treated as pastoral issues. Marriage is seen as part of the whole business of Christian living rather than an issue on which the Church must set boundaries. This changed when Constantine the Great gave bishops the right to act as magistrates, and so to decide on difficult and disputed cases.
11. The law codes of the Christian Emperor Justinian in the sixth century formulated much earlier law and became the basis of Western marriage law for a millennium and more. Eligibility is determined by the legally-defined age of puberty (fourteen for boys, twelve for girls). The couple's consent remains the basis of marriage but paternal permission must be obtained. Co-habiting couples are not recognised as married and their children are illegitimate, with the same status as children of prostitutes, although courts can regularize their status if their parents later marry.¹³ It assumes that a marrying couple are male-female.
12. From the late fourth century it became the custom for a priest or bishop to give a blessing to a couple getting married, either the day before or at the wedding feast or at the Eucharist that

¹⁰ Ephesians 5.21-6.9 for example

¹¹ This is argued in Abbott, E. 2000 *A History of Celibacy*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press: pp43-44

¹² In the *Saints Lives* of the early middle ages there is the repeated pattern of a young woman defying her family's attempts to make a marriage for her, however advantageous, and joyfully embracing a celibate life of prayer. This is the base of the story of Welsh Saints Melangell and Gwenfrewi (Winifred) amongst others.

¹³ Coleman 2004: p154

day. This was seen as an honour and a sign of the cleric's approval of the match. Gradually the cleric began to have more of a symbolic role, joining the couple's hands or putting a garland or veil over them. This developed into a ceremony in which the priest joined the couple together and blessed them. By the eighth century, this form of getting married had become common and new civil legislation had to be passed to declare these marriages valid. The exception was the marriage of clergy who, from about 400 on, were expected to have a church ceremony.

13. Among the less Romanised tribes of Northern Europe customs varied, but marriage was seen much more as a property arrangement, as in early Roman times. After negotiations between the two families, the couple became betrothed, exchanging vows and a ring but, unlike Jewish custom, the actual marriage came with the final exchange of bride-price and dowry and the handing over of the woman by her father into her husband's keeping. This was accompanied by a celebration or feast, ending with the couple entering the bridal chamber to consummate the marriage (considered complete only on consummation).¹⁴ At its most extreme, rape and forced cohabitation through kidnapping could be deemed to make a marriage.¹⁵ The priest might be a guest and bless the feast or marriage bed, or give the couple a blessing at the Eucharist on the wedding day or the day after.
14. The difference between these styles of marriage led to much discussion, some falsification of ancient documents and a fair amount of confusion. Councils began to advise that marriages should be conducted publicly with the priest witnessing as well as blessing. Hence, marriages began to be conducted closer to church premises, slowly moving to the church door, then into the building itself. By 1100, the normal pattern throughout Europe was for a couple to become betrothed then, on the wedding day, to come to church, where the priest met them at the door and asked if they consented to the marriage. He then asked the bride's father's consent and supervised the handing over of the dowry, blessed the ring that the groom gave the bride and blessed the marriage. During the nuptial mass the bride would be veiled and blessed. At the kiss of peace, the priest kissed the groom who then kissed the bride.
15. In the 1220s in Paris, Peter Lombard controversially included marriage as one of the seven sacraments in his influential theology textbook *The Sentences*.¹⁶ Theologians established some core understandings. The 'outward sign' came to be understood as mutual consent (the options eventually rejected were the priestly blessing or the consummation or unity of the couple). The 'spiritual grace' was the metaphysical unity of the couple like that of Christ and

¹⁴ This is the situation in medieval Wales portrayed in the *Mabinogion*, and the laws of Hywel Dda stress length of cohabitation rather than contract as the basis of marriage.

¹⁵ When Eleanor of Aquitaine's marriage to King Louis of France was dissolved, there were several attempts to kidnap her on her way back to Aquitaine in order to force her into marriage and thereby gain control of one of the richest provinces in Europe.

¹⁶ Anglicanism, along with most reformed traditions, asserts that there are two sacraments ordained by Christ and the rest are secondary ordinances or 'sacramentals'.

the Church. The ministers of the sacrament were the couple themselves. This understanding meant that, strictly speaking, no ceremony or blessing was necessary.

16. By the end of the Middle Ages, this understanding of marriage had become deeply ingrained in society. Marriage, a sacrament signifying the union between Christ and the Church, could be broken only by death (high mortality rates meant that the average marriage was short compared with those today), although annulments could be granted. Church courts, rather than the civil authority, had jurisdiction in these matters. At the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church retained and strengthened this high sacramental view. From 1536, for Roman Catholics, marriages were under normal circumstances valid only if they took place in a church ceremony in the presence of the priest and two witnesses, after banns had been called for three weeks to ensure eligibility and details duly entered into the parish records.
17. Luther, by contrast, believed that it was not the Church's business to define marriage law. He understood marriage as consent between two individuals, a legal agreement rather than a sacrament, something common to all humanity: "No one can deny that marriage is an external and secular matter, like food and clothing, houses and land, subject to civil supervision." The Church ought, therefore, to "leave each city and state to its own practices in this regard"¹⁷. Calvin agreed with this and the infant Anglican Church's own birth did not allow it to be too highly sacramental about marriage¹⁸.
18. The Prayer Book is uniformly positive about marriage as a Christian calling, and offers three reasons for God having given marriage to humanity: the procreation of children; a remedy against sin; and "the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other".¹⁹ This is not to say that the English Reformers celebrated an open and permissive approach to sexual relationships; they took a stern view of adultery and fornication, which Homily 11 of the First Book of Homilies (1547) defined to include "all unlawfull use of those parts, which bee ordeyned for generation."²⁰
19. In his Homily on Marriage, Bishop Jewel goes further, portraying married life as a form of spiritual warfare, in which Satan tries to disrupt the harmony of the God-given bond. Husband and wife are to be partners together in prayer for this reason. He emphasises the love which the couple have for each other and the need to take steps to guard this valuable thing: "That whereas now there is pleasant and sweet love betwixt you, he [the devil] will in

¹⁷ Martos 1981: pp435-436

¹⁸ The discussion during the Reformation of whether marriage was or was not a sacrament is covered in the paper by Ainsley Griffiths on the Church in Wales' website.

¹⁹ <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/book-of-common-prayer/the-form-of-solemnization-of-matrimony.aspx>

²⁰ <http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/homilies/bk1hom11.htm>

the stead thereof, bring in most bitter & unpleasant discord.”²¹. The English Church was developing a theology of marriage which was able to affirm the married state, not as a second-best for failed Christians, but as an arena for Christian discipleship and growth.

20. In Britain by the eighteenth century there were many ways in which a couple might come to regard themselves as married. If the couple were free to marry they might have a church ceremony, exchange their consent privately with or without witnesses or take part in a ceremony undertaken by various kinds of celebrant. Should any doubt as to their married status arise, they could apply to the local magistrate for a ‘declarator of marriage’ certification. The magistrate would hear evidence concerning cohabitation and consult friends and neighbours as to whether the couple had referred to each other as husband and wife, not just look for evidence and witnesses to a ceremony.
21. In 1754, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Hardwicke, pushed a bill through parliament which forms the basis of marriage law in Britain today. Hardwicke’s Marriage Act stated that, to be considered valid in England and Wales, a marriage must take place in the local Anglican Church, with the Anglican clergyman conducting the ceremony according to the prayer book, with banns called and the couple having parental permission if under 21. The only exceptions to this were Jews, Quakers and members of the Royal Family. Hardwicke’s Act was not passed into law in Scotland. The Act also introduced the principle that the state defined who was married and how that marriage came about and the Anglican Church policed this law for the state.
22. Marriages conducted by the state alone began in France in 1792 as part of the anti-clericalism of the French Revolution. Civil marriage came to Britain in 1836 as a concession for dissenters and non-conformists. Over time, ceremonies have become part of civil marriage, with legislation allowing a variety of wedding venues. Britain is abnormal in this. Most European countries insist on a civil registration of the marriage, leaving it to the couple to ceremonialise it if and how they choose. In Israel couples get married as they choose, then register with the state, which does not claim the right to perform the ceremony.
23. For a time, English marriage law kept in step with the teaching of the Church of England on marriage. The dictum of James Wilde, later Baron Penzance, in an 1866 polygamy case (*Hyde v. Hyde and Woodmansee*) neatly summarised how Church, state and society understood marriage in words still quoted in civil weddings: “I conceive that marriage, as understood in Christendom, may for this purpose be defined as the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others ”.²²

²¹ <http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/homilies/bk2hom18.htm>

²² *Hyde v Hyde and Woodmansee* (1866) Law Reports 1 Probate & Divorce 130

24. A deep change, however, has taken place in what couples expect from marriage. The quality of the relationship is now paramount. Revisions of the prayer book show this changing emphasis even when retaining much of the language of 1662. Instead of marriage being “a remedy against sin” we speak of it as: “a gift of God, through which husband and wife may grow together in the knowledge, love and service of God...God joins husband and wife in life-long union, as the foundation of family life (in which children are born nurtured and) in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love. Marriage enriches society and strengthens community.”²³
25. States in the western world, anxious about the possibility of marriage for the purposes of immigration, are currently tightening the concept of intention to include ideas of romantic attachment. In the United States of America, for example, couples have to submit to an intrusive procedure to determine which relationships are ‘genuine’ even when marriages have been conducted legally. In Britain also, clergy are asked to be on their guard against ‘bogus’ or ‘sham’ marriages for the purposes of immigration and citizenship.²⁴ Couples increasingly marry after long cohabitation, marriage being seen as the optional crown on their relationship rather than its base. This causes problems for states and societies in how far they should extend the privileges of marriage to those in these cohabitation arrangements.
26. As regards cohabitation of same-sex couples, the legal and cultural context in Britain and elsewhere has changed markedly over the past few decades. In 1988, Section 28 of the Local Government Act banned the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ within certain contexts. Yet the following year, for the first time in a British soap opera, a mouth-to-mouth on screen kiss between a gay couple was broadcast in Eastenders. The Sun decried it as a ‘love scene between yuppie poofs,’ something that would be inconceivable now. An attempt to equalise the age of consent for homosexual sex to 16 through the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act narrowly failed in 1994 but it was equalised in 2000 by the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act. In the same year, the prohibition on openly homosexual men and women serving in the British military was lifted. Laws banning discrimination on the grounds of sexuality were passed in various jurisdictions in Britain in 2004, 2008 and 2010.
27. In July 2012 in the United States, The Episcopal Church of the United States (the Anglican Church in the USA) approved a service of blessing of same-sex relationships. Media affairs representative Nancy Davidge explained that the blessing is “a theological response to a

²³ Representative Body of the Church in Wales, 2011, *Marriage Services*. Cardiff: Church in Wales Press. page 37

²⁴ Abbott, E. 2010. *A History of Marriage*. London: Duckworth Overlook, page 391

monogamous, committed relationship."²⁵ Such blessings have also been authorized in the Anglican Church in Canada.²⁶ In 2003 the first blessing took place in Vancouver. The 2004 Anglican Communion report (the Windsor report) criticized these developments. In response, Bishop Michael Ingham of New Westminster agreed "neither to encourage nor to initiate" same-sex blessings in additional parishes. By 2013, there were 11 dioceses offering same-sex blessings in varying degrees within the Anglican Church of Canada. In July 2013, General Synod approved a resolution that will bring the issue of same-sex marriage to a vote at the meeting of the Anglican Church of Canada's governing body in 2016. At its triennial meeting in Canada, General Synod passed Resolution C003, asking the Council of General Synod to prepare and present a motion to change the church's Canon 21 on marriage "to allow the marriage of same-sex couples in the same way as opposite sex couples." The motion was approved by a two-thirds majority of the orders of bishop, clergy and laity.

28. Culturally, homosexual relations are increasingly regarded as no different to heterosexual ones. Whilst participants in some sports, notably professional football, find it difficult or impossible to 'come out' as gay, this is not the case in many other sports. The reaction to Jan Moir's description of the death of the gay pop star Stephen Gately in *The Mail* in 2009 was another marker of a cultural shift in Attitude towards homosexuality. Gay characters and same-sex couples in British TV dramas are no longer a cause for any comment relating to their sexuality.
29. Civil Partnerships for same-sex couples became law in England and Wales in 2005. This was trailed as a legal arrangement about property and inheritance rights, but almost immediately has become a ceremony with vows exactly paralleling heterosexual civil marriage. There is growing public recognition of these unions as marriages, with increasing use of phrases like 'husband' and 'wife' to describe the partners and wholesale adoption of the customs of heterosexual marriage. Marriage between same-sex couples received the Royal Assent in July 2013, and the first ceremonies will be performed after March 2014. State marriage and church marriage will now diverge yet again in Britain. It is true that church and state have already disagreed profoundly. The first dispute was in 1835 (until 1907) on the Table of Kindred and Affinity (can a man marry his deceased wife's sister?), and again in 1937 on the liberalization of divorce by the state. Archbishop Lang felt that this was a watershed. It was only in 2002 that the Church of England allowed divorced people to marry in church under certain circumstances, and so came into line with civil law (the Church in Wales always had some discretion from the 1990s). Now the introduction of same-sex marriage causes further

²⁵ The report by The Episcopal Church 'I will bless you and you will be a blessing' provides the theological justification for this action, and also provides a liturgy.
https://www.ctepiscopal.org/images/customer-files/I_Will_Bless_You_Corrected.pdf Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, July 2012

²⁶ <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/focus/hs/ssbh/hsrg/02-resources/>

tensions. That leaves a major challenge for how the church will relate to the state on their doctrine of marriage.

30. The most enduring aspect of marriage in the West has been the consent of the individuals to live together in marriage. If they are the sacramental ministers of marriage to each other, this is as it should be. This may seem blindingly obvious but it means that state, family and Church are always potentially on the back foot, struggling to offer, for better or worse, advice, structure and protection as couples make their marriages.

The Science of Sexual Orientation: Implications for the Church's Consideration of Same-Sex Partnerships

31. At a time of radical change in attitude to same-sex relationships in our society, the Church can seem to be locked in theological sparring matches between those in favour of retaining traditional teaching and those who would welcome the blessing of same-sex partnerships in church.
32. It is vital that to hear the experiences and convictions of those for whom same-sex attraction is a lived reality. In preparing this report for the Bench of Bishops and Governing Body, the Doctrinal Commission has listened in confidence to individuals with a wide range of experience and viewpoints for whom questions relating to the Church's understanding of homosexuality are intensely personal ones.
33. Most of those who spoke to the Commission made reference to scientific studies which they have found to shed light on their experience, or to inform their theological thinking. It was thought useful to include as part of this report some reflections on the nature of the scientific endeavour and the implications for the Church's consideration of this subject.
34. The question of whether homosexual orientation is biologically or culturally determined has long been a controversial one. There are vested interests on both sides of the argument, and the literature in this area is strewn with ill-conceived studies which attempt to present sparse data in such a way as to reinforce the investigators' own a priori assumptions.
35. It is important to appreciate that when it comes to the assembling of data, scientific studies often raise as many new questions as they address existing ones. Both theology and science are essentially about a response to reality and so must proceed a posteriori - that is from observations to hypotheses and thence to theories and laws.²⁷
36. In recent years, research into the origins of homosexual orientation has been undertaken using various scientific methodologies. A number of neurological studies have reported neuro-anatomical or hormonal differences between homosexual and heterosexual males, while

²⁷ McGrath, A.E. 2001 *A Scientific Theology*, Volume 2: Reality Edinburgh: T&T Clark: pp123-124

social scientists have identified possible developmental, social and cultural influences on sexual orientation.

37. Population studies have sought to interrogate the significance of genetic factors by logging the incidence of homosexual attraction amongst sets of identical twins. While some of the early investigations were criticised for their small sample size, a 2010 study of all adult twins in Sweden reported that same-sex behaviour can be explained by both heritable and environmental factors.
38. All of these investigations are at a comparatively early stage. Most studies have required that individuals self-identify as of homosexual orientation, and although societal attitude to homosexuality are changing rapidly, it is to be assumed that there are those for whom social concerns and religious convictions have made them reluctant to speak openly of feelings of same-sex attraction.
39. The recently-released statistics on sexual behaviour in the UK not only demonstrate some radical changes in attitude over the course of the last 20 years, but they also indicate that people are willing to talk about intimate details of their personal sexual activity in a way which they were not previously. This may in turn have a significant impact on the scope of scientific studies which can be undertaken in the years to come.
40. As well as limitations in size of datasets, there is an obvious current limitation in timescales for longitudinal studies. To fully understand the development of sexual orientation, subjects will need to be revisited over a significant time period – a requirement which has not yet been realized in what is a relatively new field.
41. Thus it cannot presently be claimed that science has solved the question of how sexual orientation originates, but the cumulative evidence of studies undertaken to date does support the case for some biological determinants. There is no evidence of a ‘gay gene’ – the indications are rather that polygenetic factors may influence sexual orientation. For such factors to be comprehensively assessed, whole genome sequencing of a large number of homosexual people will be required.
42. Another controversial question is whether it is possible for an individual to change from a homosexual to a heterosexual orientation. There are certainly narrative accounts of this, but it is difficult to assess whether the experience of the individual concerned should be classed as a change in orientation or the overcoming of anxiety about heterosexual intimacy or readjustment of sexual desires.
43. During childhood or early adolescence, sexual activity may occur in an exploratory or experimental fashion, and may not necessarily correspond with a person’s enduring sexual orientation. Recent statistics suggest increasing numbers of people of heterosexual orientation who have experienced same-sex sexual activity at some point in their lives.

44. Compared to results from the 1990-1991 Sexual Attitude Survey, women are now much more likely to have had sex with someone of the same sex. Some 7.9% of women have done so, compared to 1.8% two decades ago. For men, the figures are 4.8% compared to 3.6% previously.
45. A very different sphere of scientific investigation is psychological and psycho-analytical practice, which has prompted questions concerning the mental health and well-being of those who have experienced same-sex attraction.
46. There is a large body of research evidence indicating that being gay, lesbian or bisexual is compatible with normal mental health and social adjustment. However, the experiences of discrimination in society and possible rejection by friends, families, employers and others means that some LGB (Lesbian- Gay- Bisexual) people experience a greater than expected prevalence of mental health and substance misuse problems.
47. Some would suggest that homosexual relationships are inherently less stable than heterosexual relationships. However, any outcomes which support this common assumption may themselves be linked to prevailing societal attitude towards homosexual relationships. The Royal College of Psychiatry argues that legal and social recognition of same-sex relationships is likely to reduce discrimination, increase the stability of such relationships and lead to better physical and mental health for gay and lesbian people.²⁸
48. Scientific evidence gathered to date supports the perspective that homosexual orientation should not be regarded as a pathology but as a natural characteristic which, for a small but significant proportion of the population, is acquired before birth. Of course this indication does not in itself clinch the argument of whether or not same-sex acts are morally or theologically acceptable.
49. If further, more extensive research is found to support the above hypothesis, it is possible that for some the scientific studies will prompt a redefining of the theological enterprise – so that the imperative is not “how can homosexual desires be modified?” but “what did God mean by making the world like this?” This question has been articulated in various ways. For example “God creates homosexuals as such but does not permit any homosexual acts. This amounts to a serious problem because it is not self-evident why God would do that.” Or “Does homosexuality have a divine purpose?”
50. Science cannot and should not dictate the mind of the Church. Nevertheless, any scientist who has a Christian world-view will have an understanding of his or her work as participation in a tiny yet privileged part of God’s continuing self-revelation to humanity. As we wonder at

²⁸ Royal College of Psychiatry Submission to *Church of England Listening Exercise on Human Sexuality*
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/specialinterestgroups/gaylesbian/submissiontothecofe.aspx>

new scientific discoveries and as these discoveries in time integrate themselves into our world-view, they are bound to have an impact on our understanding of scripture.

51. When we read in Genesis 1 that God created man in his own image, our scientific studies may lead us to pose the question of how a particular human characteristic pertains to the image and the creative intent of God. When we read in Romans 1 that “men gave up natural relations with women” (and if our scientific studies lead us to conclude that for some men the abandoned relations would themselves have been unnatural in the first place), we will want to consider the historical context into which Paul spoke and ask how he might have illustrated a deviation from the natural if he spoke into the particular chaos of today’s world.

The place of Scripture and doctrine

52. As a Commission, we have discussed at length the vision which Scripture and the Christian faith present of human beings, and God’s relationship to them. There have been many debates within the churches on sexuality, and the controversies have been intense. Rowan Williams, in a review of Eugene Roger’s book *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, writes that “one of the urgent needs of the church these days is to understand the ecclesial significance of controversy. To put it more plainly, we need to remember that conflict in the church is not necessarily a matter of revolt against and defence of a settled solution, but a God- given means of discovering what it is we actually believe. That is how the formulations of the classical creeds occurred.”²⁹ Rowan Williams must have often reflected on those words in the decade after he wrote them in 2003, with some sense of irony.
53. So should we rerun the controversy again, putting biblical passage alongside biblical passage, and exploring the issues of what it means to be human (the image of God, in technical terms), whether a marriage is a sacrament as baptism and the Eucharist are, and what our true end (or what it means to truly flourish) actually means? We have done all this in the Commission, and we have put lengthy and detailed papers on the Church in Wales’ website, each named by author, so those who want to explore the issue in depth may do so.³⁰ These papers are the views of the authors themselves, although they have been seen and commented on by all the members of the Commission. There is also much literature written on the topic in the last three decades. Partly we have not included these papers, because the report is long enough already. However our main reason for not including this material in the report is a different one. We have seen ourselves as a Commission dealing with (in Williams’ words) how the issue of sexuality is “ about the nature of God’s people, and their corporate holiness...the church as the community of those called to share in the Trinitarian life of God by the free gift of grace; ..seeking to articulate disciplined patterns of worship and holy life within that

²⁹ Rowan Williams, 2003. ‘Article review, Eugene Rogers’s *Sexuality and the Christian Body*’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* , 56(1), pages 82-88,

³⁰ The papers are listed in the introduction to the report.

community.”³¹ And Williams goes on, “the search to recognise holiness doesn’t become reduced to the interrogation of formulae used.”

54. Citing scriptural texts one way or the other, or arguing about creation against fall, easily becomes precisely, and wearingly, “the interrogation of formulae used.” And we have not gone there. In the rest of this report we take up “the search to recognise holiness.” For some, that means no change whatsoever in the teaching of the church. For others, it means change, either to sanction the blessings of partnership, or to sanction same- sex marriage. It is always about how the Church in Wales can be a holy people. How does the desire for God frame, illuminate and transform our sexual desire and how are we a pastoral church to those who so often feel rejected by us? That is where the rest of this report leads, into being a body that is both holy and infinitely hospitable, as we become what we are, the body of Christ for a world God loves and redeems.³² This report is about law and grace, about charity, about the love of the other. Our hope is that the following options are part of the search to recognise holiness.

Introduction to the three options

55. We now move to the heart of the report. We present three options for the Church in Wales to consider. These are ‘ marriage as the union only of men and women’ from paragraphs 57- 74; ‘ blessing same- sex partnerships’ from paragraphs 75 to 99; and finally ‘ marriage as a union of loving equals irrespective of sexual difference’ from paragraphs 100 to 134. We end with a conclusion, entitled ‘ some principles for a pastoral response.’ That is not a fourth option, but rather the principles which underlie the whole report. Each of the three options is not necessarily the one which every member of the Commission would agree with. They are there for members of the Governing Body to discuss. To put it another way, they are possibilities for the Church in Wales to discuss, and not recommendations. We agree as a Commission to present them as possibilities for the Church in Wales to consider.

Option One: Marriage as the Union Only of Man and Woman

56. People who experience attraction to the same sex are loved by God and belong in the Church. The question in debate, however, is this: can a Christian church rightly and faithfully bless same- sex partnerships? Many Anglicans (probably the great majority worldwide) are not persuaded by the arguments in favour of such blessing.
57. In part, the reason that many Anglicans do not support the blessing same-sex relationships is that the arguments in favour seem unconvincing. One major argument in favour is that, because same-sex relationships can demonstrate many of the same virtues as opposite-sex ones, such as permanence, faithfulness and stability, then same-sex partnerships are morally

³¹ Ibid p.83

³² Ibid p.85

equivalent to opposite-sex marriages. Because marriage is a school of virtue, so this argument claims, then two men or two women can demonstrate virtues and grow in them in just the same way as a woman and a man in marriage, and in consequence same-sex partnerships ought to be recognised and celebrated as marriages, or, at the very least accepted and blessed by the church.

58. But this conclusion is not logical. It amounts to saying:
- a. All good marriages produce moral virtues in the spouses,
 - b. Same-sex partnerships can produce moral virtues in the partners,
 - c. Therefore same-sex partnerships can be good marriages
59. The conclusion (c) does not follow from the premises (a and b). As an argument, this would only work if *all* types of relationship which produce moral virtues (Point b) were bases for a proper marriage. But that clearly is not the case. A business partnership, for example, can produce virtues such as loyalty, honesty, and trust – a business partnership can even be permanent, faithful, and stable – but that does not make a business partnership the basis for a proper marriage. What makes marriage different from other types of relationship (such as friendship, kinship, partnership and so on) is not its subjective qualities, or its ability to be a school of virtue. Many types of relationship can help us develop in virtue. What makes marriage different and unique is that it brings together a woman and a man in a potentially procreative, publicly-acknowledged union which is lifelong and exclusive.
60. What, then, of the argument frequently used, that social opinion has changed radically in the past few years and the church must change with it? To this it must be said that the assumptions and views of our envioning society set the challenges for our mission, but they do not determine our beliefs. It may indeed be true that people in Western Europe, North America, New Zealand and Australia now largely accept same-sex relationships without seeing a problem. This leaves, of course, a lot of people in Africa and elsewhere who see things differently, but according to this frequently-used argument, they can be expected to catch up with the rest of us in due course. But even if, for whatever reason, we think that only Western people count in this world opinion poll, what would these observations mean for the Christian church? Does it mean, for instance, that Christians have to adapt their beliefs so that they do not look odd or out of touch? The number of people in Western countries who do not believe in God is also increasing: but presumably we would not, in consequence, abandon our belief on God in order to come in line. And equally, if we were to accept this argument and adjust our beliefs in tune with the surrounding society, we would not need a Governing Body to discuss our doctrine and practice, because a focus group or opinion poll would tell us what beliefs we should retain or reject. In fact, though, as the Barmen Declaration of 1934 put it, the church cannot and must not ‘acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and

besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation'.

61. The reference to the Word of God reminds us that many Anglicans remain unpersuaded because in scripture they find that the distinctive characteristics of marriage can only apply to a man and a woman. Many Anglicans remain unpersuaded because the distinctive characteristics of marriage can only apply to a man and a woman. These characteristics are laid out in the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2, where we find the foundations and structure which distinguish marriage from all other forms of relationship. These foundations, which are then unfolded throughout scripture, have been consistently affirmed in Christian teaching ever since. Until our own day they have never been considered doubtful, ambiguous or open to interpretation. We can identify seven of these foundational structures:
62. (1). *The distinction of male and female.* Both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 underline the vital difference between male and female. In Genesis 1 sexual differentiation is evident at the beginning. It is a reality more profound than ethnic distinctions, differences of culture or diversity of employment and occupation. All those distinctions are secondary and develop in the history which will follow. But the distinction of humanity as male and female is primary. In Genesis 2, sexual differentiation is described in a way which explains the rightness and aptness of the coming together of man and woman as two parts of what was originally one humanity. But in both chapters, we notice that being male and being female is not a trivial distinction. It is foundational
63. It was on male and female that God pronounced his blessing in Genesis 1.28. From their union would spring the fruitfulness and the right stewardship over creation about which Genesis 1.28-30 speaks. So the union of these two sexes is the union which God can bless. Fruitful human flourishing springs from this union. Texts in Leviticus (Lev 18.22 and 20.13) and in the Pauline letters (Rom 1.18-27, 1 Cor 6.9-11 & 1 Tim 1.8-11) forbid the sexual activity of men with men or of women with women, but these passages add nothing to Genesis 1 and 2. They merely spell out the implication of Genesis: not only is the physical union of the two sexes that which God can bless, but the physical coming together of the same sex with itself is that which God does not bless.
64. (2). *The status of adulthood.* Genesis 2.24 makes clear that it is speaking about the union of two adults, a man and a woman ready to take on the responsibility of forming a new family together. Cultures differ in ideas about when people enter adulthood and age of consent, but marriage can happen only between adults, however adulthood is defined. The union God can bless is the union of two adults, one of either sex.
65. (3). *Monogamy.* Genesis 2.24 also says "a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife." The single reference to a man and his wife certainly points towards monogamy, a bond of marriage exclusively between two individuals. Monogamy is already

implied in the binary relationship of man and woman. There were polygamous households in the OT, such as those of Abraham, David and Solomon. But the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) who preceded the giving of the Law are not always models of virtue, and the OT makes clear that the multiple marriages of David and Solomon caused weakness in their kingdoms. Certainly, by the time of the NT, marriages seem to have been always monogamous, the preferred option in scripture. Monogamy is made explicit by Jesus, who inserted the word 'two' to his citation of the text of Genesis 2.24, and added his own explanation, 'so they are no longer two but one flesh' (Mark 10.8).

66. (4). *Genetic distance.* Genesis 2.14 declares that a man leaves his father and mother in order to be joined to his wife. The union which God blesses has to incorporate gender difference (man and woman) and it has to incorporate genetic distance (marriage outside the immediate family).
67. (5). *Lifelong and Exclusive.* Permanence and exclusivity are strongly implied in Genesis 2.24: the man shall 'hold fast' to his wife. Permanence is an aspect of marriage which the rest of scripture treats as read. Marriage is intended to be for life. Equally important is the exclusive nature of marriage. Jesus made it absolutely clear that there is no double standard for his people. The degree of exclusive faithfulness which the wife owes the husband, the husband also owes the wife (Matt 5.27-8). Even if in practice this intention is difficult to realise, a marriage can truly be a marriage only if the man and woman entering it intend it to be lifelong and exclusive.
68. (6). *Social recognition.* When Genesis 2 speaks of 'leaving father and mother' and of becoming 'one flesh' it is clear that the new husband and wife set up home together. Probably in OT times this meant moving into a dwelling in the compound of linked dwellings of family members comprising 'the father's house'. The way of leaving father and mother is very different today but the principle is the same. It is not merely a private matter for two individuals to do as they think fit. The creation of a new sexual union is of interest to the families united by it, and to society, whose own stability and survival is built on that of the family.
69. (7). *Potential for procreation.* The potential for procreation is set out in the command to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1.28). The union of men and women has, generally speaking, the potential for procreation. We cannot, certainly, always know that a particular union of a man and a woman will produce children, any more than we can guarantee that a particular marriage will succeed as a relationship. But that does not mean that the (non-procreative) sexual partnership of men with men or of women with women is essentially similar to the (non-procreative) marriage of an opposite-sex couple beyond the age for conception. An infertile union of a man and a woman is wholly different from the sexual partnership of a man with a man or a woman with a woman. Even if a man and a woman are, for instance, past the

age for conceiving children, their union differs only in degree, not in kind, from the union of any male-female couple. When a man and a woman unite sexually, their bodies form a whole which Genesis describes as ‘one flesh’, co-ordinated towards the common biological end of the generation of new life. This distinguishes the infertile opposite-sex couple from any two people of the same sex:

70. “Bodily coordination is possible even when its end is not realized; so for a couple [of opposite sexes], bodily union occurs in coitus even when conception does not. It is the coordination toward a single end that makes the union; achieving the end would deepen the union, but is not necessary for it.”³³
71. Discussion of same-sex partnerships often downplays the significance of the procreative potential of marriage. But we should not minimise the significance of this potential. No other relationship than that of a man and a woman has the potential to generate new life, and no other relationship stands under the blessing of God proclaimed in Genesis 1.28. The love of a man for a man or of a woman for a woman, when physically expressed, is a type of sexualised friendship. But lacking the potential to generate new life, and not expressing the coordination of male and female towards procreative union, it is not a marriage.
72. If a sexual relationship lacks any one of these elements, it is not a marriage. All seven need to be in place for a relationship to be the basis of a marriage which God can bless. So, for instance, an incestuous relationship might fulfil every criterion except genetic distance. But it would still be ethically flawed. Same-sex relationships cannot express the binary union of male and female so do not meet the first criterion, the most basic element because the other six elements flow from it, or develop its significance and implications. Nor, indeed, can same-sex relationships fulfil the seventh and highly significant element of forming the potentially procreative union at the heart of marriage.
73. Given that people who experience same-sex attraction are loved by God and belong in his Church as much as anyone else how does this work out in practice? For the same-sex attracted person, as for anyone, God’s love is a transforming love, and belonging to his Church should be a transforming experience. Anyone who comes to Christ finds that God loves us as we are, but loves us too much to leave us as we are.
74. Churches in the New Testament period included people who had been engaging in a variety of activities inconsistent with their new relationship with Christ. St Paul (1 Corinthians) mentions financial sins – stealing and swindling – which put in peril the individual’s inheritance of the kingdom of God. There were also sexual sins – adultery and same-sex activity – which Paul places in the same category (1 Corinthians 6:9). “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit

³³ Sherif Girgis, Ryan T Anderson, & Robert P. George 2012 *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: a Defence* New York/London: Encounter Books: p26

of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6.11). The good news for same-sex attracted persons is the same good news which comes to all: that all need the washing of sanctification; that anyone can be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that every justified believer will be sanctified, made more like Jesus, by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, even though that process will be demanding. This gospel perspective gives the Church its theological context for approaching the pastoral care of those attracted to their own sex.

75. In his dissenting statement to the Church of England’s Pilling Report (2013), the Bishop of Birkenhead expressed well what a church would look like which practises such pastoral care: (References are to the Pilling Report §488)

(c). It commends marriage as an institution lovingly created by God in which one man and one woman enter into an exclusive relationship for life, believing this to be the only form of partnership approved by God for sexual relations and thus the only form of sexual partnership that properly expresses love for God.

(d). It encourages churches to be safe spaces where everyone, including those with same sex attraction or bisexual attraction, is able to share and explore his or her story with fellow believers for mutual encouragement and support as we help each other grow together into maturity in Christ.

(e). It commends and encourages all who experience same sex or bisexual attraction and have committed themselves to chastity by refraining from homoerotic sexual practice, welcoming as leaders those of them God calls to ordination.

(f). It supports all those who responsibly seek to help Christians who experience sexual attractions in conflict with their commitment to live in accordance with biblical teaching, encouraging the Church to offer all Christians counsel and pastoral support to live a chaste life.

76. Our friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues number amongst those who experience same-sex attraction. There is a strong appeal in the argument that we must adjust the Church’s view to ensure their happiness. Western society is increasingly hostile to those who question the goodness or rightness of same-sex relationships: this provides a powerful motive to secure our own good name by conforming to the majority opinion of our contemporaries. Is same-sex marriage just another ethical issue on which Christians can agree to disagree? Is this debate leading us to change our teaching and discipline in order to ensure personal fulfilment for our neighbours and avoid social disapproval for ourselves? Scripture and the consistent teaching of the Church over twenty centuries compel many to view the debate in terms of a choice between obedience to God or conformity to the world, a touchstone of authentic Christian life; and “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5.29). Would such radical obedience damage our witness to our society? A Church with an unpopular message certainly faces a challenge: but a Church which evades the challenge of

obedience will have no life-changing message at all. Article 20 of the 39 Articles puts the issue succinctly: “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word written.” Yet that is precisely what we would be doing, if the Church were to presume to pronounce a blessing on same-sex marriages, or even on more broadly-defined partnerships of a similar nature.

77. Some might suggest that there is a middle way which does not change our teaching or discipline. The Church of England’s Pilling Report attempts to steer such a middle way, suggesting an option for clergy, with the approval of their PCC, “to mark the formation of a permanent same sex relationship in a public service” (Recommendation 16) without producing any authorised rites. But such a pastoral accommodation entails ordaining something contrary to God’s word written, and that cannot be right. Offering disobedience as an option does not turn it into obedience. A faithful Church, a Church which the apostles would recognise, cannot presume to bless as holy what God has said is not holy.

Option Two: Blessing Same-Sex Partnerships

78. The argument for blessings, rather than marriage, is in three stages. First, across the world the Anglican Communion is experiencing the reality of faithful Anglicans forming same-sex partnerships. This is true in Britain, North America, and now (during 2013) in Australia and New Zealand. That is different from Africa, where a very different culture pertains, not only in terms of sexuality but also in terms of attitude to gender and relationships in general. Here, the pastoral reality of same-sex partnerships has not emerged, and is not likely to emerge for many decades, except perhaps in South Africa.³⁴ The Church in Wales should learn from this growing exploration of the appropriate theological and pastoral response. Theologically, this is seen as a process of reception by the Church of a new understanding of Christian living.
79. Secondly, marriage is in the view of many theologians to be understood as being only between a man and a woman. This view is expressed in terms of scripture, tradition and systematic theology. Nevertheless, we need an appropriate liturgical and pastoral response to faithful same-sex partnerships, and that is a blessing. Some theologians and philosophers are now challenging the close link between marriage and sexual difference. Some of those arguments are to be found in the papers on the Church in Wales’s website. However the matter is briefly explored here.
80. Thirdly, a liturgical blessing of same-sex partnerships would be a novelty in the history of Christian liturgy. That should be recognised as part of the challenge of living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but it is important to be clear what we are about.

³⁴ Archbishop Desmond Tutu has long campaigned for gay rights. In 2005 he said:” Sexual orientation... is a given. ... We treat them [gays and lesbians] as pariahs and push them outside our communities. We make them doubt that they too are children of God – and this must be nearly the ultimate blasphemy. We blame them for what they are.”

81. *A growing movement within the Anglican Communion.* The argument for blessing same-sex partnerships is clear and consistent. It begins with the pastoral reality of those members of the Church who fall in love and form partnerships. It is important for them and for society that such relationships are publicly recognised, affirmed and contribute to the stability of society. Since 2004, the United Kingdom Government has provided civil partnerships for same-sex couples and many in the churches in Britain have wanted to bless such an act of commitment. That reality is echoed across many provinces of the Anglican Communion. The story can be briefly told, and it is a story that needs to be recognised in the province of the Church in Wales.
82. Within Canada, there was a move by 2010 for many dioceses to bless such partnerships. While this has caused enormous division within the Anglican Communion, in the Anglican Church of Canada there has been little controversy, after the initial shock; such blessings are now regarded as part of the pastoral norm inside the Anglican Church. It is true that there was controversy originally, but there was also such division about racially integrated parishes in the 1960s (it is now regarded as shocking that it was ever different) and equally there was at first division about women priests. When women became bishops over a decade ago, some Anglicans refused to accept this. Women bishops and same-sex blessings are now regarded as the norm in the Anglican Church of Canada, except in a small minority of parishes.³⁵
83. Similar stories could be told in the United States, although it is true that some churches have broken away from the Episcopal Church because of its policy. Nevertheless, many dioceses have accepted the blessing of same-sex partnerships, and there have been two bishops in such relationships. In July 2012, General Convention formally authorised a liturgy across the Episcopal Church. The report by the Episcopal Church, 'I will bless you and you will be a blessing' provides the theological justification for this action, and also provides a liturgy.³⁶
84. In Australia and New Zealand, there are also signs of change. In Australia, the diocese of Perth voted to recognise same-sex relationships in October 2013, although the Archbishop dissented from that vote. Also in 2013 the Anglican Church in New Zealand set up a doctrinal commission (the Ma Whea Commission) to look at a theological rationale for the liturgical blessing of people in permanent, faithful same-sex relationships. It will report in 2014 to the General Synod.
85. In Britain there has been much discussion both in the Scottish Episcopal Church and in the Church of England. In November 2013 the College of Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church indicated:

³⁵ *Report of the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-sex Unions (the St. Michael's report)* 2005

<http://www.anglican.ca/primate/files/2010/11/StMichaelReport.pdf>

³⁶ https://www.ctepiscopal.org/images/customer-files/I_Will_Bless_You_Corrected.pdf Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, July 2012

“that it was the practice of the individual Bishops at that time neither to give official sanction to blessings of civil partnerships, nor to attend them personally. The Church does not give official sanction to informal blessings but each Bishop would nevertheless expect to be consulted by clergy prior to the carrying out of any informal blessing of a civil partnership in his diocese. The College is of the view that a decision as to whether or not to attend such an informal blessing should be a personal decision of the individual Bishop in question.”

The Provost of the Anglican Cathedral in Glasgow conducts such blessings. The College of Bishops has indicated that they will consider the question of sexuality this year.

86. Within the Church of England, in 2012 a letter to *The Times*, signed by a number of retired and serving bishops, deans and other clergy argued for the introduction of same-sex marriage in civil law, and for an appropriate response by the Church of England. The Archbishop of York in June 2013 said in the debate on same-sex marriage in the House of Lords that the issue of blessing same-sex relationships was a major one for the Church of England, and illustrated his argument by saying that he could bless a ship or a tree, but not such relationships. In November 2013 the report on sexuality for the House of Bishops of the Church of England (the Pilling report) avoided the term blessing. However, it suggested that there could be circumstances where a priest, with the agreement of the PCC, should be free to mark the formation of a same-sex partnership by a public service (paragraph 387)³⁷. Unofficially such services have also been performed inside the Church of England, as the book *Unheard Voices* by Jeffery Heskins³⁸ makes clear.
87. What this survey shows is that in many Anglican provinces across the globe where same-sex partnerships are accepted in society, Anglican bishops and diocesan and provincial synods are considering the issue. They move at differing speed, for this is a great change. Nevertheless, the momentum is there, just as it was for women’s ordination in the 1970-80s. Many of them ordained women long before Wales did so, and a similar story could be told on the blessing of same-sex partnerships. The theological argument is that this is a process of reception by the Anglican Communion. What drives it is a desire to be pastorally responsive to Christians in same-sex partnerships. Wales is no different from many other provinces in considering the matter. We need to listen to our brothers and sisters in other Anglican provinces. What matters in any process of reception is how the matter is considered, lovingly and respectfully, while always acknowledging the pastoral imperative of praying with those in same-sex partnerships. Again and again in Anglican provinces where same-sex partnerships are now

³⁷ *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on human sexuality* GS Misc 1929 , 2013 London: Church House Publishing, (cited as the Pilling report)

³⁸ Jeffery Heskins 2001 *Unheard Voices* London: Darton, Longman and Todd

culturally unremarkable (especially for young people), there is a growing sense that this issue must be responded to pastorally, and therefore liturgically.

89. *Theology of blessing.* A blessing is not the same as a marriage. As the T.E.C. spokeswoman said, “We have authorized a blessing, and a blessing is different than a marriage. A blessing is a theological response to a monogamous, committed relationship.”³⁹ A marriage of one man and one woman is both ‘an honourable estate, instituted by God himself’, so grounded in our created nature, and a sign for us of ‘the mystical union between Christ and his Church’, so in that respect speaking to us of the nature of redemption.⁴⁰ It is also understood as a sign of the unity-in-difference of the Trinity. It is on this basis that a marriage is blessed by the Church: such relationships are signs of God’s faithful union with the created order. Marriage of one man and one woman is not a social construct, still less a political invention, but a given of our creaturely nature. Furthermore, Christian tradition witnesses to the unchanging nature of that reality: it is between a man and a woman.
90. Understanding marriage as a sign of God’s relationship with creation is well attested in scripture. The covenant between God and the people of Israel is symbolised in the union of Hosea and Gomer (Hosea 1). In the Song of Songs, the soul which longs for the divine is spoken of in terms of a virgin searching for the king as her sexual partner. Isaiah 61 and 62 are replete with images of the Lord God coming to his people as a bridegroom to his bride. In Revelation 21 the New Jerusalem appears as a bride adorned for her husband and, in Revelation 19, the eschaton is spoken of as the wedding feast of the Lamb when Christ claims his bride, the Church.
91. Nevertheless, a pastoral response is called for to those of the same sex who fall in love and form partnerships. There are theologians who are very sympathetic to homosexual relationships, but who wish to protect the nature of Christian marriage (as opposed to marriage as a civil institution in society which is recognized by law). Such arguments do not deny the reality of homosexual relationships, nor that they are loved and cherished by God, nor therefore that such unions should be joyfully and properly celebrated in the Church. However, marriage is not the right expression of this. Theologians such as John Milbank argue that the irreducible differences of men and women found in Christian theology are the only basis for marriage. Marriage affirms the complementarity of men and women, and in this union of different genders it builds a relationship which in principle is open to procreation. Therefore marriage in Christian tradition is about children (at least potentially) and difference. Milbank argues:

³⁹ <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/10/us/episcopal-same-sex-unions/> CNN Global News View
Episcopal Church approves same-sex blessing service July 11 2012

⁴⁰ Quotations are from the Church in Wales Marriage Service 1984 which echoes Ephesians 5

“It may well be best if the Anglican Church were to move swiftly to permit the blessing of gay civil partnerships in church. For this would render the strongest possible theological statement of the view that it is possible to recognise the legitimacy of faithful homosexual union without conceding that this is tantamount to marriage - a view that is entirely logical and has many historical precedents in different cultures.”⁴¹

92. Pragmatically, as well, some church leaders have argued that the Church can unite around the possibility of blessings of same-sex couples, in some parishes and not others, whereas same-sex marriage would threaten a creation ordinance and divide the Church

93. Heskins’ book on his experience as a vicar in South London who has performed such blessings for many years is a very compelling theological defence, as well as a very moving account of the experiences of the couples who came to him. He begins with the experience of the same-sex couples whom he has blessed, and describes their relationship as challenging conventional categories. They are friends, but a friendship marked by a particular kind of intimacy. It is also the case that John 15:15 describes Jesus saying that his disciples are no longer servants but friends, a relationship marked by a particular intensity of intimacy. Friendship in John 15 is given a particular kind of status, and indeed could be called a superior way of relating. For the fourth gospel there is revelation of the divine life through Jesus’ friendship with his disciples, and that revelation would not have been possible without that friendship. Heskins speaks of the need to recover the concept of friendship in theology, and the importance of challenging received understandings of friendship in contemporary society. If friendship is about the sharing of deep intimacy, and is revelatory of divine love, then what matters in a liturgy of blessing is that it expresses through a service of covenanted union those elements of friendship that unite each couple. Heskins argues that the couples he has blessed testify to the difference a service of blessing makes to some aspect of their lives together. Above all it provides affirmation, stability and a celebration of all that is to be valued in their relationship. Blessings express the covenant relationship of the Creator, and bind people together in a covenant relationship.

94. The Episcopal Church report argues in a similar way:

“The meaning and character of blessing play an important role in our shared calling to participate in God’s own mission of reconciling love in the world. Pronouncing divine blessing takes many forms covering a wide range of occasions. When the Church gathers to bless the exchanging of sacred vows in a covenantal relationship, the blessing reflects a threefold action. First, the Church gives thanks for the presence of the Spirit discerned in the lives of the couple. Second, the Church prays

⁴¹ John Milbank ABC religion and ethics 13 March 2012 <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/>

for the divine grace and favor the couple will need to live into their commitment to each other with love, fidelity, and holiness of life. And third, the Church commissions the couple to participate in God's own mission in the world. This missional character of covenantal blessing, reflected in both Scripture and the historical traditions of the Church, deserves renewed attention today. While the Church gives thanks for God's presence and blessing, the public affirmation of the blessing of a covenantal relationship also sets that relationship apart for a sacred purpose: to bear witness to the creating, redeeming, and sustaining love of God. ”⁴²

95. Such a blessing would be different from the blessing of a couple after one of the partners has been divorced. That takes place because in some church traditions it is not possible to be married twice in a church liturgy. There is therefore a note of fallenness in such a liturgy of blessing, however joyful it may be, because a marriage of at least one of the parties ended in divorce. Those who argue for blessing of same-sex relationships do not accept that it is a fallen relationship.

96. Not all theologians, however, accept the argument of Milbank and others on the difference between marriage and a covenantal blessing. Jean Porter, a world authority on medieval and contemporary natural law, writes:

“In my view, a natural law analysis of the purposes of sex and marriage does not foreclose the possibility of recognizing unions which are by their nature non-reproductive, but which allow for the expression of the mutual fidelity and interpersonal love of the partners – indeed, we have good theological as well as natural law reasons for doing just that. At the same time, a natural law analysis would rule out an interpretation of marriage according to which the expression of love should be the primary and regulative purpose of marriage as a social institution, to the neglect or detriment of its fundamental purpose as a framework for reproduction.”⁴³

97. The debate will continue between these theologians. Some theologians follow anthropologists in recognising the plasticity of human sexuality in different cultures, and through this plasticity there is a need to build a sexual ethic for contemporary relationships. The argument about whether one opts for blessings or marriage for same-sex couples turns on how gender (enculturated dispositions) is put alongside sex as a biological and physiological function, and whether gender roles should be based on complementarity or differentiation.

⁴² https://www.ctepiscopal.org/images/customer-files/I_Will_Bless_You_Corrected.pdf Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, July 2012

⁴³ Jean Porter 'The Natural Law and Innovative Forms of Marriage: A Reconsideration.' *The Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Volume 30, No 2 December 2010.

98. *The novelty of what is proposed liturgically.* Mark Jordan⁴⁴ is deeply critical of attempts to show that there were such same-sex blessings in past centuries. Although he writes powerfully in defence of the need to affirm same-sex relationships, he denies that such unions have been blessed before. Despite attempts to argue just that, Jordan points out that medieval liturgies were not concerned with celebrating and solemnizing personal commitment: “Even on the textual level – before one gets to questions of performance or divine causality - the meaning of a liturgy cannot be reduced to any literal paraphrase.”⁴⁵ Liturgy invokes divine action, and it cites scriptural poetry in the service of Christian truth. What is not there in medieval liturgies that record the friendship of two people of the same sex is a straightforward attempt to bless personal, sexual unions in a same-sex relationship. This is because the medieval idea of friendship is for us now a vanished kind of relationship, feeling or emotion that was “intrinsically public because caught up in a rich network of physical and social relationship.”⁴⁶ So Jordan dismisses the well-known arguments of Boswell and Bray that there were such rites of same-sex unions in the past, even if the Church has suppressed their memory.⁴⁷ They did not mean in any way what we now want them to mean, and if they had meant what we think them to mean (blessing sexual relationships, with an emphasis on the personal and sexual) in the medieval period, they would have been dismissed as unacceptable.
99. Jordan is far bolder. He looks at lesbian and gay identities today that are adopted by Christians outside the Church, such as the quasi-ritual of coming out, marching in a Pride parade, or going into a queer space such as a gay bar. These are contemporary ritual identities, and they are not simply political, cultural or social actions, although they may be that as well. They are social rituals that enact both personal and communal identity, and they are created within and by communities, including those of Christian lesbians and gays. Memorials for those lost to AIDS are in the same vein: they negotiate identity for their participants, who may of course be straight or gay. However, it is also important to note that some gay and lesbian Christians find such rituals with their language of dramatic gestures, deeply antithetical to their nature.
100. A liturgical rite of blessing same-sex unions would have to perform ritually a symbolic set of gestures, words and citations that can speak both to the subjects with whom it is performed (the same-sex couple), and also might (this is a highly qualified commendation) relate to the current rituals used in their communities. But most importantly, such liturgies must invoke scriptural texts, typology, creation, redemption, salvation history, with the whole eschatological meaning

⁴⁴ Mark Jordan ‘Arguing Liturgical Genealogies, or the Ghosts of Weddings Past’, in Mark D Jordan, Meghan Sweeney and David Mellott (Eds) 2006 *Authorizing Marriage? Canon, Tradition and Critique in the Blessing of Same Sex Unions* Princeton: Princeton University Press,

⁴⁵ Jordan p107

⁴⁶ Jordan p109

⁴⁷ John Boswell 1994 *Same-sex Unions in Premodern Europe* New York: Villard Books, and Alan Bray 2003 *The Friend* Chicago:University of Chicago Press

of the union of divine glory and human finiteness in the service of the God who has created and redeemed us all. Jordan argues strongly for this point for one reason. Too often, Christian marriage (between a man and a woman) has sacralised or (crudely put) made religious the civil union performed by the state. That reduces Christian liturgy to the decoration on the cake, or at worst a form of social control. At best, as Jordan says in a striking phrase, liturgy serves only to “ratify the local etiquette.”⁴⁸ He therefore argues that it is time for the Church to do a genuinely new thing: to create liturgies of blessing that speak to their subjects (lesbian and gay people), relate to the social rituals which they also participate in, and ask the blessing of God on their relationship. To quote Jordan for once more: “any liturgy must remain an incomplete register of traces of performed eschatological gestures...a liturgy for blessing unions will attempt to accomplish something that eludes any description, much more any paraphrase. The words and actions of a liturgy of union are not supposed to be adequate figures for the recognition, consolation or support they offer”.⁴⁹

101. It is genuinely new, but it responds to the pastoral reality that is now before the Church. Moreover, it stands in a tradition of other liturgies that have always invoked divine action on those who need God’s assistance and blessing. In that, they are no different from any other public liturgy, across the centuries. As we open ourselves to the Spirit of God, we are confronted with the task of living faithfully before the triune God, whose life reveals God’s grace.

102. The introduction of the blessing of same-sex unions has been a regular feature of the Anglican Church of Canada since 2010, and is now considered part of the pastoral norm for that Church in many, but not all, dioceses. Similar arguments apply in the United States (the Episcopal Church) and unofficially there have been a small number of such blessings in the Church of England. The Pilling report commended it (but not unanimously) in its report in November 2013. The main reason for commending blessings is a pastoral one. A period of experimentation would allow the churches to respond to same-sex couples in an affirming way. Whether marriage is between only a man and a woman in Christian faith is a debate that we must have in the years to come. For now, we need to cherish and love those who follow Christ, join the Anglican Church, and form same-sex partnerships. Not least, that is because the love between them expresses the love of God towards them, and the Church should bless that, just as the Church blesses all that God has made and is very good: swarms of living creatures, birds, great sea monsters, beasts of every kind⁵⁰- and even, we can now argue, same-sex partnerships. The generosity of God in his creation is limited only by the limited response of the Church, just as it was to those of different ethnic backgrounds from our own

⁴⁸ Jordan p120

⁴⁹ Jordan p117

⁵⁰ Genesis 1:24

in past centuries,⁵¹ and of women who a few decades ago sought ordination. It is time to change, and rejoice with God in blessing his creation as very good.

Marriage as a Union of Loving Equals Irrespective of Sexual Difference

103. In blessing and conducting services of marriage, and in acknowledging ceremonies conducted in secular and other faith contexts, the Church in Wales upholds marriage as a diverse feature of human society, offering a unique opportunity to recognise the nature and presence of God in the world.
104. Marriage is rooted in creatureliness: it is part of our bodily nature. It is also an eschatological proclamation, blessed in this way by the Church because it speaks of Christ and his Church, and of the 'new creation'. Although in tension with some interpretations of scripture and cultural traditions, marriage has evolved in ways that are consistent with the Gospel and with the overall prophetic, Spirit-led direction of the development both of scripture and of its interpretation. The trend has been towards a vision of the equality, mutuality and character of the relationship, rather than of partners defined by their biological function.
105. To open marriage to same-sex couples would continue this trajectory of conforming the flesh to the Spirit and will strengthen, not weaken the ability of marriage to proclaim the heavenly realities of the Kingdom. Indeed, it may help to strengthen our understanding, moving away from a concept of marriage as a matter of fixed biological categories and roles, and towards one of marriage as a union of loving equals in the Spirit.
106. Consideration is given here to the contribution that same-sex couples can make to a Church in Wales theology of marriage, focussing on Creation and The Image of God; The Kingdom of God and a New Creation; Love, Flourishing and Friendship; and Procreation, Sex and Children.
107. *Creation and the Image of God.* Marriage is a 'gift of God in creation' but our understanding of creation is an evolving one. Biblical creation stories offer fresh insights in the light of developing disciplines such as cosmology, evolutionary theory, psychology, sociology and biology. Current Christian theology, concerned as it is with themes of identity and relationship, characteristically starts from the perspective of the embodied nature of people created in the image of God. Personal identity is now seen as fluid and multifaceted, developing and diverse, not essentialised and constant. Similarly, a Trinitarian perspective shows us that, being made in God's image, we are dynamic persons in relationship, each with

⁵¹ The reference is to the first black Anglican bishop in Africa, Samuel Crowther, who was consecrated in 1864 but given jurisdiction only over non-whites.

a unique character. We are not confined to fixed, gendered roles, and do not find our unity as persons in ways that are grounded in normalising descriptions of sex and gender.

108. In terms of sexual identity, we do not simply have one fixed denominator of identity – a male/female binary - but rather a biological sex, an experienced sex and a sexual orientation which together define how we experience our embodied reality. Each of these features may be male, female, both or neither and do not predict each other. While being a man, male and attracted to (biological) women, or a woman, female and attracted to (biological) men may be the statistical norms, they are not normalising, and a significant number of people experience what is for them a different norm.
109. For some, biological identity (in terms, say, of chromosomes or reproductive organs) does not neatly fit into the male/female binary. They may regard themselves as intersex, or both male and female, or neither. Others, such as transsexual or transgendered people, may experience tension between their biological sex and their experienced sex or socially constructed gender role.
110. Marriage that recognises without distinction a variety of gender and sexual orientations, as well as the experience and biology of intersex people, would avoid the need for binary categories such as "gay partnerships" and "straight marriages" which again force an essentialist definition upon creation.
111. Genesis 1 teaches that God creates us in all our diversity, but that this diversity is held together in unity. Creating categories of 'separate but equal' blessed relationships does not capture the unity of creation (or the new creation) because it does not capture the unity of the image of God, and its universal application to humanity. By including within one concept of marriage any two people without binary distinctions, the Church can more adequately reflect the image of God in creation and the nature of God-given human identity. Some have argued that Adam's recognition of Eve is one of similarity, not difference.
112. It can be argued that the distinction between male and female is a distinction of kind, and not of degree, and that to properly express the unity of humanity, a marriage must include a male and a female, one of each kind. But this is neither biologically accurate nor theologically orthodox. Biologically the distinction between male and female is one of degree - involving a small genetic distinction on one out of 46 chromosomes. Certainly there is nothing in human biology to suggest that an equivalent distinction of 'kind' to that made between 'all kinds of living things' in Genesis 1 should be thought to apply to male and female humans. Indeed, biology confirms what is affirmed in Genesis, that despite superficial differences and appearances, humanity is truly one flesh, including in relation to our most evident distinction, the distinction of sex.

113. Theologically also, the incarnation demands that we cannot regard sex as a distinction of 'kind', in theological thought. If it were, Jesus could not have been fully human, only fully male. He would have only taken on half our human nature by being made man.

The Kingdom of God and a New Creation

114. As well as being rooted in creation, Christian blessing of marriage proclaims a reality that transcends and completes creation: it proclaims The Kingdom of God. It may be regarded as sacramental because it embodies in an earthly way a spiritual reality, thereby "signifying to us the mystical union between Christ and his Church" (Book of Common Prayer 1984 Marriage Service). That Church is a diverse Body, able to incorporate the great diversity of humanity unified in Christ (Gal 3:26-28).

115. The new creation is not a return to a past "Golden Age" whose form is already fixed, fossilised in a specific text or historical period. This present world is radically open to possibility, to evolving potential and changing forms. In this world we can glimpse, in the Trinity and in creation, through parable and prophetic imagination, the promise of the as yet unrealised new creation. The end goal of creation is Christ and in Christ there is no male or female, or any other category of worldly and fleshly distinction.

116. The Church has, from its early days, wrestled with the implications of this teaching, determining over time that circumcision of the heart means rejecting circumcision of the flesh; that our spiritual slavery to Christ means rejecting the physical slavery of other people; that our understanding of the impartiality of God's calling means rejecting an exclusion of women from being ordained as priests and bishops. This is part of the consistent trajectory of the work of the Spirit found within scripture itself and in the tradition of the Church in Wales. To continue to follow the Spirit on this faithful path with regard to marriage is to affirm that a good marriage evidently bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). This is marriage in the light of the Spirit rather than the flesh, and its fruit are not confined to only one form of sexual partnership.

117. *Love, flourishing and friendship.* Church and society uphold marriage as a good discipline and structure for long-term, loving commitment, helping couples to flourish in the context of family and community. The Church in Wales understands marriage as an embodiment of love in Christ, describing it as a state "in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find comfort, companionship and strength, and grow to maturity in love. Marriage enriches society and strengthens community." (Marriage Services 2010)

118. Marriage may therefore be seen to be about flourishing. Focussing on flourishing helps us hold our experiences of ourselves as bodies-in-the world and as members of a community together with our experiences of the numinous. Like the true vine that Jesus describes (John 15: 1-8), flourishing involves human interconnectedness, compassion and nurturing love that promotes growth, well-being and justice within an inclusive, liberating,

welcoming community. Resisting mind/body, spirit/matter dualism, flourishing requires not only words but action: the redemptive process of justice-making, engaging critically and prophetically with the world in order to bring in God's kingdom.

119. Our discussion about same-sex partnerships and civil same-sex marriage (legal in Wales after March 2014, but not within the Church in Wales) is informed by the way human bodies and processes influence and mould our desire, knowledge and decision-making. The Church has always found actual bodies challenging, and bodies and sex together rather problematic, especially in relation to the divine; and this discomfort is evident around homosexuality. The Church's attitude is found by some to be antithetical to their flourishing; they have not found hospitality, liberation or justice, and many have experienced forms of exclusion and discrimination. The Church has tackled issues of inclusivity with regard to ecumenism, race, physical and mental ability and gender. Now, we are similarly challenged on the issue of gay and lesbian people and their desires to flourish.

120. Sexual love that is both godly and bodily entails fundamental respect for the other, equality of exchange, and attention to the other's needs. To flourish spiritually and materially, we each need to find our true identity and to see it symbolically recognised by others. This is essential for growth and fulfilment. But homosexual individuals and couples are often marginalized, overlooked, discriminated against or regarded as inferior.

121. In keeping with a deep-seated discomfort about otherness, largely expressed in terms of impurity and inferiority, many heterosexuals harbour an atavistic dread or revulsion of those whose sexual orientation is other than theirs. But are our current cultural boundaries around sexual behaviour based soundly on what is for the common good, promoting the flourishing of both individual and community? Or might some boundaries rest on historic prejudices around bodily otherness? Is the Church's attitude coloured by a fear and suppression of otherness? Does continuing divine revelation call us to question these boundaries and proscriptions? Might fresh insight accept that homosexual people are able to mediate the divine through their embodied and sexuate nature?

122. If we want a just and caring society in which all can flourish, with the benefits and rigours of marriage near its heart, then we cannot exclude non-heterosexual couples, if their relationship is not antithetical to their own or to the common good. Indeed the discipline and support of the public institution of marriage would promote both the couple's good, and that of wider society, contributing to the flourishing of all. Marriage as a common good suggests that this recognized framework for a loving relationship is important both to the couple and to the community: a school for virtue with obligations of life-long commitment, and protection and nurture of family members, including children.

123. *Procreation, sex and children.* This is rightly seen as a particularly celebrated gift of God, in which we become co-creators with God. This sacramental quality is acknowledged

as part of the sacramentality of marriage. But not every marriage must include procreation. The Church in Wales' marriage service now places the connection between marriage and procreation in parenthesis, as an option which may or may not be relevant or desirable for the couple being married.

124. The Church does not bar from marriage those who do not want or who are unable to conceive, or who are past child-bearing age. Married couples who are childless or celibate do not weaken our corporate understanding of marriage; indeed they can deepen it. Some couples may experience childlessness or an inability to have sex as tragedy, and show Christ to us in the way they hold their pain together. Others may be 'Eunuchs for the Kingdom' (Matthew 18:12), choosing either celibacy or childlessness, temporarily or permanently, in their relationship. Celibacy is affirmed by the Church as part of the proclamation of the Kingdom; it is eschatological, or 'of the new creation'. To borrow from the Catholic tradition, it "proclaims the presence on earth of the final stages of salvation with the arrival of a new world, and in a way it anticipates the fulfilment of the kingdom as it sets forth its supreme values which will one day shine forth in all the children of God." (Pope Paul VI *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* 1967)

125. A celibate, infertile or post-menopausal marriage necessarily remains biologically childless. So, too, same-sex couples cannot procreate sexually; yet, as with other relationships, this should not be a bar to marriage. Just as the Church welcomes married couples who cannot be biological parents, extending marriage to non-heterosexual couples does not weaken the connection between marriage and procreation. This connection is not weakened either by the Church welcoming those not conceived through sexual intercourse. Likewise, the Church in Wales' affirmation of contraception does not redefine sex or remove any connection between sex and procreation, but it does draw attention to the other purposes and meanings of sexual activity, extending its definition and emphasising it as a physical expression of love, rather than a purely biological action. Indeed, the many ways in which people can, through their sexual activity, harm each other and themselves, or build each other up in love, are mostly predicated not on the relative form of their genitals but through the ways in which inner realities of motivation, understanding, love and purpose, and their absence, are given physical expression. It is the way people treat each other that counts, not the shape of the fleshly tools they use to express this. As we understand circumcision to be of the heart and not the penis, so the way in which we must treat each other sexually is dictated by the heart and the Spirit and not the genitals.

126. The teaching of Christ prioritises the 'reconstituted family' of the Kingdom over the biological families, and the theology of St Paul prioritised adoption as children of God over claims deriving from biological descent. In this way, families who raise the children of others increase, not decrease, the sacramentality of marriage and human relationships. They have

children after the Spirit and not after the flesh and speak to the Church of God's activity in the new creation just as biological parents speak of God's creative activity in this world. Adoption and step-parenting are eschatological acts. The raising of children by same-sex couples has this same quality.

127. We now have stable family homes where gay couples are successfully caring for children and demonstrating a variety of forms of relatedness between parent and child. Marriage would provide these couples with the security of public recognition and support; those who desire to enter into a committed, loving relationship would not be faced with a choice of committing either to celibacy or to a secular form of cohabitation.

128. A Church in Wales cleric was approached for blessing by a lesbian couple. They were providing care for two children, one with physical and mental disabilities, the other of mixed race. Together this family bore many of the markers of biological division used to discriminate between people and divide the essential unity of humanity made in the image of God. But they are, each equally to the other, a source of joy and spring of love that transcends any physical or social barrier. That they should ask for the blessing of a Christian minister, after all that has been directed at them and their identities, is itself deeply humbling and speaks eloquently of the values of the Gospel evident through their union. That the cleric was ashamed to be able to offer only his own blessing and not the official sanction of the Church might indicate that the Gospel was being proclaimed in only one direction that day.

129. "It is remarkable that in a world where there is a great deal of competition and the encouragement of individual self-fulfilment, the fact that people want to get married is a realisation that true fulfilment can only be found in relationships of love" (Archbishop Barry Morgan, Preface to Marriage Services 2010). It is still more remarkable that gay and lesbian people should wish to be married by a Church that has caused them so much pain. We must be humbled that some do, and unsurprised that some do not.

130. *Enriching marriage:* A Christian understanding of marriage is not threatened by the inclusion of homosexuality; it is enriched by it. Blessing a marriage between a same-sex couple would not be a redefinition but a deepening of the Christian understanding of marriage, consistent with the path of its development through scripture and tradition. If marriage is a common good, then a denial of the possibility of marriage for same-sex couples disregards the legitimacy of their identity and experience, rendering their love, desire and experience voiceless, rejecting the original goodness of each person as they are: whole, and worthy of love. This failure of love is a bar to the flourishing of all members of society, a challenge to the notion of marriage as a common good, a hindrance to each person's encounter with the gracious favour of God.

131. Non-heterosexual views of sex, love, relationships and marriage might usefully inform debate within the Christian tradition. They may offer a critique of a traditional

marriage code moulded by the theological paradigm of subordination and inequality of the relationship between the Church and Christ, with a male head and subordinate wife, whose biological function was associated with defilement, shame and impurity. Flourishing entails relationality, life and nurturing. Historically, however, marriage patterns have tended to value dominance, fixed roles and hierarchy above mutuality and connectedness, leading to tragic injustices of exploitation and abuse of women, homosexuals and others. A recognition and loving acceptance of the human variety of sex, gender and sexual orientation would render such injustice inconceivable. Same-sex couples may have some valuable experience in equality, mutuality and reciprocity in relationships that the Church might usefully listen to: indeed gay or lesbian partnership may give marriage as a whole more to mean, for instance around Jesus' radical message of equality before God and inclusivity within the Church.

132. When preparing this report the Doctrine Commission listened in depth for a day to invited people who experienced sexual attraction to people of the same sex (some of those we listened to would reject the designation homosexual). We learnt a huge amount by engaging respectfully in conversation, without questioning the validity of our guests' experience. Four people spoke individually to the Commission, each conversation lasting over an hour. Two, speaking of their experienced same-sex attraction, felt that it was important for themselves as Christians and therefore for the churches to maintain the traditional line. The remaining man and woman simply described themselves as lesbian or gay, both commenting on civil partnerships. Both wanted the opportunity of same-sex marriage, and for this to be offered by the Church. Their argument was simple. In the case of heterosexual couples, men and women fall in love, there is legal recognition of their love in the wedding ceremony, and if they are Christians who fall in love and seek to be married, then they naturally make their vows before God in a church wedding ceremony. Why cannot this be the same for gay and lesbian people? Anything else would feel like it was not the 'real deal', but a way of being short- changed.

133. This point is strengthened by the empirical research carried out by the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University, and Professor Linda Woodhead, on the views of church members and of society as a whole on matters of belief and personal morality. This research has been used as the basis for a series of debates and consultations, and has been extensively publicized. In the Church Times, Linda Woodhead wrote:

“The important point is that younger people are still open to faith, but increasingly closed to the Churches and indeed to religion in general. Religion has become a toxic brand...Among Christians under 45 years of age, for example, less than 30% think that same-sex marriage is wrong, and an absolute majority think it is right (the rest “Don't know”). This results in a gulf in values between over- 60s and under - 50s. The church (meaning here the Church of England) is officially on the side of the

former, and set against a moral shift as significant as that which took place earlier in the twentieth century in relation to race.”⁵²

134. Those who speak on behalf of the gay community, such as Changing Attitude, or LGCM, have expressed similar views.⁵³ While Changing Attitude has not publicly committed itself to calling for the churches to accept same sex marriage as a Christian rite, it has published extensively on the debate in parliament, during 2013,⁵⁴ including those who say that “extending the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples might in fact be a redemptive step.”⁵⁵

135. The extending of marriage to all couples regardless of sex would provide everyone with the discipline of constructive self-sacrifice that seeks to serve others, thus serving the edification and mission of the Church. Christian same-sex marriage would extend a sacred space where gay and lesbian people can practise sanctification and understand themselves as members of the Body of Christ through, and not despite, their sexuality.

136. Such an evolution of practice would not change the meaning of marriage, it would enrich it. It would express more authentically the Christian understanding of creation and human identity in God's image, thus better proclaiming the Gospel in an increasingly materialistic culture. In moving beyond a definition of human identity based on biological categories, the Church can better witness that the Kingdom of God is not of this world; that life is to be most fully lived not in outer conformity to the physical structures of this world, to the flesh and the Law, but in the Spirit, in the love of God and the inner realities of the heart. In marriage, as in Christ, there can be no male or female. But Christ is all, and is in all.

Conclusion to the report: Some principles for a pastoral response

137. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. John 1.14 (NRSV)

The Gospels bear witness to a Saviour who is fully God and fully human, who chooses the way of humility and sacrifice, and who calls all people into a pattern of life-giving relationship exemplified in God himself. As such, Christianity is an incarnational faith which does not begin with dogma or doctrine but with people and call. The principles for a pastoral response set out below apply whichever of the three options above are preferred.

138. An implication for the current discussion is that in the consideration of moral and theological questions there must never be a bypassing of reality for those for whom these

⁵² Linda Woodhead, 'Time to get serious', pp 23-4, *Church Times*, 31 January, 2014

⁵³ <http://changingattitude.org.uk/?s=same+sex+marriage>

⁵⁴ <http://changingattitude.org.uk/?s=same+sex+marriage>

⁵⁵ Charlotte Methuen, *Changing Attitude* April 12, 2013, <http://changingattitude.org.uk/archives/7105>

questions are not merely theory but bound up in a deeply personal way with their own experience and identity.

139. In studying Jesus' initial encounters with strangers in the Gospels we discover repeatedly his compassionate and immediate response to human need. Where he does pose questions, these are invitational rather than testing: 'Come and see', or 'What is it that you seek?' Instances of doctrinal or moral challenge are usually issued not by Christ himself, but by the person with whom he speaks.
140. If Christ were born in Wales in 2014 and walked our streets aware of the trembling touch of those who dare not express their need, he would doubtless encounter someone whose sense of exclusion or even guilt were bound up with their experience of a sexuality which in their lifetime had met with condemnation and disgust.
141. Another strand in Jesus' engagement with those of his day is the recognition that unless people are able fully to identify with a particular lived experience; they find it extremely difficult to formulate an appropriate response. We see this in the Pharisees' blanket condemnation of those trapped in poverty who are failing to observe the minutiae of the regulations they hold so dear. We see it in the well-meaning attempts of the disciples to dispense with those whom they assumed their Master would regard as a nuisance, and in the endeavours of those disciples to persuade Him to abandon a course of action that they thought ill-advised. It is even evident in Jesus' own agony that his closest friends proved incapable of comprehending the path that he must tread.
142. In direct opposition to such behaviour is the attitude of the risen Christ as he encountered two disciples who, torn apart by disappointment and grief, travelled the road to Emmaus. Here, although he challenged their understanding of Scripture, there was not an attempt to deny their lived experience, or demand that they turn around. There was rather an accompanying, which did eventually lead to transformation in the context of shared hospitality and the breaking of the bread.
143. We are led gently to the conclusion that another person's lived experience is holy ground. After Christ's example we are called to lay aside our own agenda – be it doctrinal orthodoxy or radical change – and listen to the felt need which the other can neither process nor explore without the gift of that non-judgemental space in which personal perspectives and experience can be openly acknowledged.
144. In creating the space in which people who experience same-sex attraction can both explore their own reality and participate fully in the current debate, we need also to recognise another (and potentially overlapping) perspective. Those who have pastoral leadership in the Church have a lived experience of the immediate need to offer compassion and acknowledge the reality of the dilemmas around sexual orientation and same-sex partnerships that are acutely relevant to those in their care. It is also the case that there are pastoral needs of those

who would be appalled by the thought of their church countenancing same- sex partnerships at all.

145. These observations find resonance in the concept of ‘pastoral accommodation’ which has been described as ‘a response to some urgent presenting needs without ultimate dogmatic implications’.⁵⁶

146. This concept is hard to grasp if we regard it as challenging our fundamental moral stance. In exploring a possible pastoral response, pastoral accommodation does not attempt to argue for or against an orthodox understanding of marriage, but to suggest that it may be possible in some sense to hold together a range of convictions in order to create space for genuinely new insights to emerge.

147. The theologian Oliver O’Donovan developed this idea further in his presentation to the Pilling Commission on human sexuality in 2013, observing that we now find an entirely new construction of homosexual behaviour and that the Church would be ill-advised to act over-swiftly at a time of such dramatic change.

148. The results of the Lancet’s Survey on Sexual Attitude and Behaviour published in 2013 underline this sense that what is taking place currently is a significant departure and is not simply the next step in greater permissiveness in relation to sexual practice. Whereas in 1991 less than 50% of men, and 53% of women, felt that ‘Adultery in marriage is always wrong’ the present study shows these percentages to have increased to 66% and 70% respectively. It also shows that, while in 1991 25% of people thought that there was nothing wrong at all with same sex relationships, this figure has increased to approximately 57% today.⁵⁷

149. Pastoral accommodation hints that we offer an unconditional hospitality to those with whose practice or prohibition we might instinctively disagree. Those who promote this approach would argue that it would define a new arena in which it becomes possible to listen more deeply for the voice of the Holy Spirit, ‘not only in the thoughts, words and lives of those with whom one agrees but in the contributions of those one believes to be wrong’⁵⁸.

150. This section does not present a distinct alternative to the options for the Church’s response to same-sex partnerships, and same- sex marriage by the state, but suggests the development of a set of pastoral principles as preliminaries to any more extensive debate. Church and state are now further apart than they have ever been in Britain on their doctrine of marriage, and that is a pastoral challenge, if nothing else.

⁵⁶ cf Church of England Faith and Order Commission Report 2013: ‘*Men and Women in Marriage*’

⁵⁷ Lancet 2013 *Changes in sexual Attitude and lifestyles in Britain through the life course and over time: findings from the National Surveys of Sexual Attitude and Lifestyles* (Natsal)

⁵⁸ Pilling Report paragraph 310

151. Increasingly, both churches and individual Christians are recognising the need for a pastoral response towards a range of people: those whose faith leads them towards abstinence; those who find same-sex relationships compatible with their faith those who feel let down, oppressed or rejected by the Church.
152. A pastoral statement to lesbian and gay Anglicans from 188 member bishops of the 1998 Lambeth Conference pledged to “continue to reflect, pray and work for your full inclusion in the life of the Church.” Such a pledge has profound implications for those within and on the periphery of the church community, and should challenge all in ministry in the Church in Wales.
153. In his Governing Body address in 2012, the Archbishop of Wales spoke of gay and lesbian people as being “talked about rather than talked to” in the Church. We need to be aware of how our personal sexual orientation and marital status may affect our ability to listen deeply or to understand the situation of others.
154. The Archbishop went on to warn that “Gay people may once again gain the impression that the church is uncaring and unsympathetic... things could be said in the coming months which could seriously damage people pastorally.” Some of the members of the Commission suggest that the Church may wish to consider a call to corporate repentance in recognition of its previously negative response to those of homosexual orientation. There have also, of course, been more positive responses across the whole spectrum of theological standpoints.
155. The personal reality of homosexual orientation, coupled with assumptions (right or wrong) about the attitude of the Church, has led some to conclude that they will never be welcome in the Church in Wales. Others may attend Sunday worship but take care not to engage too deeply in parish life for fear that their personal reality would eventually lead to rejection. So as a first principle of pastoral response it is vital that the Church communicates clearly its welcome to people who experience same- sex attraction.
156. A second principle linked with pastoral accommodation involves recognising that whatever the status of the theological debate, and no matter how long the consultations and deliberations continue, there are those with current and pressing concerns which cannot be overlooked: “I am a Christian in a civil partnership. What is the Church’s attitude to the step I have chosen to take?” “I experience same-sex attraction and have chosen to be celibate. What expert pastoral support is available to me?” “I am an ordained minister in a civil partnership. Can my partner be present at my induction service, or do I pretend that they do not exist?” Those with responsibility for pastoral care are already presented with these concerns and many more.
157. A further consideration is whether there can be a meeting of differing opinions, aware that the way forward might not yet be on the table – something very different from what any

group has yet imagined. This is potentially an exciting possibility, whose feasibility depends on the Church recognising the pressing concerns described above. It entails recognition and respect for lived experience and for dearly held, yet potentially contradictory, theological views.

158. O'Donovan concluded his presentation to the Pilling Group with a challenge:

“To find a way of acting, then, that is charitable, modest, provisional, ideologically light, keeping the Church’s mind flexible and open, a way of acting that has more of the experiment than the conclusion about it, does not base itself on sweeping assertions of fact or principle that turn out to be false coinage which nobody can honour: that is the almost superhuman demand made of you and of those who will later build on your work.”

Might this challenge equally well be offered to the House of Bishops and Governing Body of the Church in Wales in their deliberations in the months to come?