

Executive Summary

Report from the Church in Wales Standing Doctrinal Commission

The Church in Wales and Same- Sex Partnerships.

The report sets out initially the history of marriage as the background to the discussion of same- sex partnerships. In particular this section looks at marriage in Roman times; the Jewish understanding of marriage at the time of Jesus; the early church's teaching, with its emphasis on celibacy, and the fact that not until the fourth century A.D. did a priest or bishop bless the couple getting married. Not until the thirteenth century, as well, was marriage seen as a sacrament. The report discusses the teaching of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer on marriage, and the crucial importance of the 1754 Marriage Act in England and Wales. Here, for the first time, marriage was only legally valid if performed in an Anglican church by an Anglican cleric. However by 1836 marriage in a registry office was allowed as a concession to non- conformists. The growth of cohabitation and same -sex civil partnerships is discussed, and finally the 2013 Same- Sex Marriage act is mentioned, which becomes law in March 2014, and sets the context for the discussion of the report. .

The next section of the report (paragraphs 31- 51) discusses the implications for the church of the scientific debate about sexual orientation. In particular, the final three paragraphs of this section argue that science should not determine the mind of the church, but there is a need to reflect on the growing scientific evidence 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". What is the moral and theological significance of this fact?

Therefore the report proceeds to discuss the place of scripture and doctrine (paragraphs 52-4). This section is brief, because the lengthy papers on this topic are on the Church in Wales' website. What is important is that the church engages in a search for holiness for itself before God. The report then considers three options for the Church in Wales. One is a restatement of the traditional position, that marriage is only between a man and a woman (paragraphs 56-77). The second option is the blessing of same- sex partnerships, which is now allowed in some Anglican dioceses in Canada and the United States (paragraphs 78- 102). Thirdly there is the option of marriage between a couple irrespective of sexual difference (paragraphs 103-136). Finally the report ends with an emphasis on what a pastoral response would look like.

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