

Resolution for the Representative Synod, 24 April, 2021
- Regarding the Report 'God in Love Unites Us'

APPENDIX

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30 January, 2021

Introduction

This document contains texts and comments which support the argument for a resolution to be sent to Conference and should be read in conjunction with it.

Marriage Service in *The Methodist Worship Book* (1999)

The Methodist Worship Book (1999) in the 'Introduction' to the ritual of marriage states: 'A marriage ceremony is a formal occasion when a solemn, legal contract is made between a man and a woman. In a Christian context, it is also an act of worship in which marriage is celebrated as a gift of God and the joy of the couple is shared and their commitment to each other is witnessed by family and friends. *The Marriage Service's* themes of love, hope, faithfulness, sacrifice and trust are at the heart of the Christian gospel.' (page 367).

At the beginning of the service (point 4), the minister says,
'A and C, with your families and friends, we thank God on this day for the gift of marriage.

It is the will of God that, in marriage, husband and wife should experience a life-long unity of heart, body and mind; comfort and companionship; enrichment and encouragement; tenderness and trust.

It is the will of God that marriage should be honoured as a way of life, in which we may know the security of love and care, and grow towards maturity. Through such marriage, children may be nurtured, family life strengthened, and human society enriched.

No one should enter into this lightly or selfishly, for marriage involves the giving of a man and a woman wholeheartedly to each other. Christ in his self-giving comes to our help, for he loves us and gave himself for us.

A and C, you are now to share this way of life which God has created, and, in Christ, has blessed. Today we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen you that you may fulfil God's purposes for the rest of your lives.' (page 369).

The Teaching of the Marriage Service in *The Methodist Book of Worship*

This teaching is an expansion of the doctrinal statement contained in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of The Methodist Church*, 'The Methodist Church believes that marriage is a gift of God and that it is God's intention that a marriage should be a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman. The Methodist Church welcomes everyone, whether or not a member, who enquires about an intended marriage in any Methodist place of worship. (Book III Standing Orders, Section 01 General Provisions, 011A Marriage (1)).

The key points are that:

- 1) marriage is theologically a gift of God,
- 2) it is a life-long union of one man and one woman,
- 3) marriage should be a state where there is comfort, mutual encouragement and trust,
- 4) marriage is a state in which children can be nurtured and family life strengthened.

Protestant Origin of the Doctrine of Marriage.

At the beginning of the marriage ceremony as given in the 1549 *Prayer Book of King Edward VI* (see Section 1.), the priest states the origin and purpose of 'holy matrimony' is from the earliest times of human life (Adam and Eve). God instituted marriage and it is seen as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and His Church. Three reasons given for the 'ordaining' of marriage are:

- 1) the procreation of children and their Christian nurture,
- 2) the prevention of sexual sins, and
- 3) to provide help and comfort to the couple in all circumstances of life.

This declaration also states that marriage is between two people, one male and one female.

Continuity of the Doctrine of Marriage in the Protestant Tradition.

The Methodist Service Book of 1975 makes a similar statement to the 1549 Prayer Book (see Section 2.) about both the nature and character of the marital relationship (what marriage is, and what is the character of the relationship of the two people involved in it). The American Methodist Church *Book of Worship* (1964, see Section 3.), the American United Methodist Church *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992, see Sections 4 and 5) and the Church of England's *Book of Common Worship* (2000, see Sections 6 and 7) likewise all make the same point that marriage is from God, that it serves the purposes of providing a place for the procreation and Christian nurture of children, and is a state for the mutual support of the two partners in the marriage. These liturgies also state that marriage is a union of male and female.

The introductory material in each of these liturgies constitute the doctrine or teaching about the nature of marriage (what it is) and the character of the relationship between the two people, the husband and wife, in the marriage. And, it is stressed that the source of this view of marriage is based upon the teaching of Scripture.

Claim by the Report that Marriage has Changed.

Although the Report in Section 3.3 discusses 'Marriage as a social and legal institution', there is no definition given of what marriage is, and Section 3 provides no discussion of the historic, traditional Christian or ethnographic meaning of the institution of marriage. Instead, in Section 3.3.1, the Report boldly states that 'as a social institution marriage has also appeared in many guises and is constantly changing'.

However, the Report's review of the rubrics in the books of liturgy does not give **any evidence** of a change in the **definition** of what marriage is. However, it does show an increasingly greater emphasis on the companionship of the marital couple. This emphasis on companionship is no more than a reiteration of the teaching of *Genesis* 1: 26-27 and *Genesis* 2: 18-24 which forms the basis of the rubrics of the Methodist and Anglican marriage service from the Prayer Book of 1549 down to the present day.

Texts of the Marriage Service in the Anglican and Methodist Traditions.

1. 'The Form of Solemization of Matrimony'

The First Prayer Book of King Edward VI (1549). (modernised spelling).

Dearly beloved friends, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honourable estate instituted of God in paradise, in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy estate, Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore is not to be enterprised, nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discretely, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Duly considering the cause for which, matrimony was ordained. One cause was the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and praise of God. Secondly, it was ordained for the remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such person as be married might lie chastely in matrimony, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity. In the which holy estate these two persons come now to be joined. Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined so together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

2. 'Declaration of Purpose'

The Marriage Service', Methodist Service Book (1975).

We are gathered here in the presence of God to witness the marriage of A. B. and C.D., to support them with our prayers, and to share their joy.

Marriage is given by God. It is not to be entered upon or thought of lightly or selfishly; but responsibly and in the love of God.

According to the teaching Christ, marriage is the life-long union in body, mind and spirit, of one man and one woman. It is his will that in marriage the love of man and woman should be fulfilled in the wholeness of their life together, in mutual companionship, helpfulness and care. By the help of God this love grows and deepens with the years. Such marriage is the foundation of true family life, and, when blessed with the gift of children, is God's chosen way for the continuance of mankind and the bringing up of children in security and trust. The union of husband and wife is in Scripture compared to the union of Christ and his Church, for he loved the Church and gave himself for it.

A.B. and C.D. are now to marry each other, and to seek God's blessing for their married life. If anyone knows of any reason why they may not lawfully marry, let him now declare it.

3. 'Marriage Service'

The Book of Worship for Church and Home (Methodist Church USA, 1964).

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together *this man and this woman* in holy matrimony; which is an honorable estate, instituted of God, and signifying unto us the mystical union which exists between Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence in Cana of Galilee. It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discretely, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons come now to be joined. If any man can show

just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.'

4. 'Marriage Service'

The United Methodist Book of Worship (United Methodist Church USA, 1992),

Christian Marriage I.

Greeting

Friends, we are gathered together in the sight of God to witness and bless the joining together of *Name* and *Name* in Christian marriage. The covenant of marriage was established by God, who created us male and female for each other. With his presence and power Jesus graced a wedding at Cana of Galilee, and in his sacrificial love gave the example for the love of husband and wife. *Name* and *Name* come to give themselves to one another in this holy covenant.

5. 'Marriage Service'

The United Methodist Book of Worship (United Methodist Church USA, 1992),

Christian Marriage II.

Greeting

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this man and this woman (*Name* and *Name*) in holy matrimony, which is an honourable estate, instituted of God, and signifying unto us the mystical union that exists between Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence in Cana of Galilee. It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons come now to be joined.

6. Pastoral Introduction

Church of England Book of Common Worship (2000).

A wedding is one of life's great moments, a time of solemn commitment as well as good wishes, feasting and joy. St John tells us how Jesus shared in such an occasion at Cana, and gave there a sign of new beginnings as he turned water into wine.

Marriage is intended by God to be a creative relationship, as his blessing enables husband and wife to love and support each other in good times and in bad, and to share in the care and upbringing of children. For Christians, marriage is also an invitation to share life together in the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is based upon a solemn, public and life-long covenant between a man and a woman, declared and celebrated in the presence of God and before witnesses.

On this their wedding day the bride and bridegroom face each other, make their promises and receive God's blessing. You are witnesses of the marriage, and express your support by your presence and your prayers. Your support does not end today: the couple will value continued encouragement in the days and years ahead of them.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13.4-7

7. Preface

Church of England Book of Common Worship (2000)

In the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we have come together

to witness the marriage of *N* and *N*, to pray for God's blessing on them, to share their joy and to celebrate their love.

Marriage is a gift of God in creation through which husband and wife may know the grace of God. It is given that as man and woman grow together in love and trust, they shall be united with one another in heart, body and mind, as Christ is united with his bride, the Church.

The gift of marriage brings husband and wife together in the delight and tenderness of sexual union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives. It is given as the foundation of family life in which children are [born and] 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 is a way of life made holy by God, and blessed by the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with those celebrating a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Marriage is a sign of unity and loyalty which all should uphold and honour. It enriches society and strengthens community. No one should enter into it lightly or selfishly but reverently and responsibly in the sight of almighty God. *N* and *N* are now to enter this way of life. They will each give their consent to the other and make solemn vows, and in token of this they will [each] give and receive a ring. We pray with them that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen them, that they may fulfil God's purposes for the whole of their earthly life together.