**Objections to the Acceptance of the Conclusions of the Report**

**‘God in Love Unites Us’ (2019).**

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**Summary of the Argument.**

1) The Report proposes a change in doctrine (teaching) of the Methodist Church regarding marriage.

2) A minor change is suggested in the rubric of the marriage ceremony, but the Report provides no indication of what the new Methodist teaching on the meaning and purpose of marriage would be.

3) Marriage is a doctrine (teaching) of the Methodist Church, which in its content is in alignment with the historic teaching of many other Protestant churches.

4) The Methodist teaching on marriage is codified in the prefatory comments made as a statement about the nature and purpose of marriage which precedes the beginning of the marriage ceremony itself.

5) In English language books of church liturgy, the teaching on marriage dates back to the 1549 Prayer Book of King Edward VI. This teaching usually appears at the start of the ceremony as a statement of the meaning and purpose of marriage.

6) The Report should not be accepted because, as a doctrinal issue, the Report does not provide a definition of what Methodism would understand marriage to be.

Up to this time, we have had a clear statement of the meaning of marriage as contained in the rubric of the marriage service. **Having a ‘mixed economy’ , changing the rubric to ‘two people’, would mean that we have no teaching on the nature and purpose of marriage.**

The Report cannot be approved by offering a statement to the effect that ‘once approval has been given, the form of the service can be created subsequently’. This is putting the ‘cart before the horse’. There must be a definition of marriage providing the teaching of the meaning and purpose of marriage. What Conference has to approve is a definition of marriage, a doctrine or teaching on the nature and purpose of marriage.

7) Methodism arose to promote ‘Scriptural holiness.’ For the Methodist Church any doctrine (teaching) must be rooted in the teaching of Scripture. The Report provides no definition of what marriage is, and no sound Scriptural basis for the claims it makes to change the teaching on marriage.

**Commentary on the Report ‘God in Love Unites Us’.**

**1. The Report proposes changes in the wording of the marriage ceremony which is a change in doctrine.**

*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).

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. Where do these ideas come from ?

**2. The origin of the doctrine of marriage contained in the marriage ceremony is found in the earliest stage of the English Reformation.**

At the beginning of the marriage ceremony as given in the 1549 Prayer Book of King Edward VI (see Appendix A.), 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) for the procreation of children and their Christian nurture, 2) for 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.

**3) The intent of the statement contained in the 1549 Prayer Book on the nature of marriage as well as much of the phrasing of the statement have been used in both Anglican and Methodist liturgies down to the present day.**

*The Methodist Service Book* of 1975 makes a similar statement to the 1549 Prayer Book (see Appendix B.) about both the nature and character of the marital relationship (what marriage is, and what the character of the relationship of the two people involved is). The American Methodist Church *Book of Worship* (1964, see Appendix C.), the American United Methodist Church *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992, see Appendices D. and E.) and the Church of England’s *Book of Common Worship* (2000, see Appendices F. and G.) likewise all make the same point that marriage is from God, and that it serves the purposes of providing a place for the procreation and Christian nurture of children, and a state for the mutual support of the two partners in the marriage. They 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. Why does this matter to us Methodists ?

**4) The Deed of Union states that Methodist doctrine is based on Scripture.**

‘The doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church are as follows:

The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.

The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church are pledged are contained in Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.’ (*The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* Book II, The Deeds, Part 1 Deed of Union, Section 2 Purposes and Doctrine, 4 Doctrine, p. 213).

This statement makes two important points – Methodism came into being to foster a Christian life of holiness founded on the teachings of Scripture, and that the teachings of Scripture are individually and collectively the ‘supreme rule of faith and practice.’ That is, **whatever the Methodist Church decides on doctrinal matters must be in accord with the teaching of Scripture.**

**5) The Report claims that there is no clear indication in the Bible of what marriage means.**

The Report in Section 2.3.3 and elsewhere says that we have only a few clues about what marriage in the Bible meant, and particularly in the New Testament. However, it is quite clear from numerous passages in the New Testament that ‘marriage’ refers to a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman. For example, some of the most stringent of the teachings of Jesus have to do with marriage and sexual behaviour. In the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, Jesus is recorded to have set a far higher standard for marriage than in the Law itself (*St Matthew* 5: 27-32) indicating how important He viewed both our sexual behaviour and our attitudes toward marriage.

One incident illustrates the prevalent view of marriage at that time. Once, Jesus was challenged by some Sadducees about a hypothetical woman married to several brothers in succession (*St. Matthew* 22: 23-33). At the resurrection whose wife would she be ? Jesus indicated the situation would be different, that is, who we are is not determined by our bodily form. The assumption in the challenge made by the Sadducees was that if marriage is monogamous whose wife would this woman be ?

The importance of cross-gender monogamy for the Early Church is seen in Paul’s letter to Timothy (1 *Timothy* 3) when stresses the importance of monogamy and marital fidelity for a leader of the Christian community. Thus, the teachings of Jesus, the commonly held view of Jews of His day, and of the Early Church assumed and taught that marriage was a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman.

The Report in Sections 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.1.2 goes on to cite various passages from Scripture to indicate Scriptural ambiguity on an understanding of marriage and sexual behaviour. One passage cited is *1 Corinthians* 6: 9 -10, part of a larger section in the text of Paul’s letter highlighting the moral implications of sexual behaviour which are contrary to Christian values and behaviour. Paul gives a number of examples of sexual behaviour which are not acceptable from a Christian view, among which are people called ‘male prostitutes’ and ‘homosexual offenders’ (NIV translation). In the Greek, Paul refers to μαλακοί (catamites), and αρσενοκοίταί, which is usually translated as ‘homosexuals’. This latter term is particularly important in understanding Paul’s view. The term is a compound noun composed of ‘αρσενο’ meaning male and ‘κοίταί’ which literally means the marital bed, and thus by extension sexual activity. Clearly, Paul sees male homosexual practice as contrary to male-female marital relations. It is a violation of the marital bed.

After having stated that there is no clear Scriptural view on marriage, the conclusion of Section 2.3.3 veers off on a different tack when it says, ‘In New Testament times, the belief that the Second Coming and the end of the world were imminent led to the early Christians continuing traditional Jewish models of the family’. **This statement in the Report is an admission that there is no Scriptural support for a definition of marriage other than that it is monogamous and cross-gender.**

Moreover, monogamous heterosexual marriage was not just a Jewish/Christian moral value; it was also upheld by both Greeks and Romans in the era of the Early Church. For example, the Emperor Augustus in the early part of the first century had made strenuous efforts to restore traditional Roman values which had to do with monogamy and fidelity. **Heterosexual monogamy was a universal value whether Christians were of Jewish, Greek, or Roman ethnic origin.**

From this discussion, it is clear that

a) there is abundant evidence that the New Testament understanding of marriage is as a monogamous, cross-gender institution, and that

b) there is no evidence that homosexual practice was approved, or that there was an institution of cross-gender marriage.

**The conclusion is that there is no evidence to support the Report’s view of the ambiguity of marriage, nor to support a view that marriage is anything other than monogamous and cross-gender.**

**6) The Report claims that an examination of the wording of Methodist marriage liturgies over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows that our understanding of the nature of marriage has changed and is changing.**

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. Rather, 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’. This is a very inaccurate statement which implies that the term ‘marriage’ refers to a category whose definition has changed over time and continues to change. **This is simply not the case.**

What does the Report mean when it says marriage has ‘changed’ ? The Report’s table ‘Changes in the expressed purpose of marriage within Methodist liturgy’ (page 96) tracks ‘changes’ in the ‘definition’ of marriage through an examination of Methodist books of liturgy from 1846 down to the current *Methodist Worship Book* of 1999. In section 3.1.9, the Report states that ‘our understanding of the purpose of marriage has changed significantly’ from procreation to companionship.

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, but 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, and is found in the rubrics of the marriage service in English beginning with the Prayer Book of 1549. See the Appendices below with examples from the British and American Methodist Churches and the Church of England.

**The Report’s review of the wording of the marriage service cannot be used to indicate a change in our understanding *what* marriage is.**

**7) Concluding remarks.**

**The Report’s conclusions cannot be sustained, and the Report should be rejected.**

a) For nearly five-hundred years, English-language teaching on the nature of marriage as seen in the rubrics of the marriage liturgy has been consistent. It is a monogamous institution of a man and a woman for the purposes of the procreation and nurture of children, and the mutual companionship and support of the couple in the marriage.

b) This teaching on the nature of marriage is consistent with the teaching of the New Testament, both in the words of Jesus, and in the letters of Paul providing guidance to the first generation of Christians.

c) The Report proposes a change in the Methodist Church’s doctrine (teaching) on the nature and purpose of marriage. To continue within the Methodist tradition of ‘Scriptural holiness’, a new teaching must have a foundation in the teaching of the Bible, especially the New Testament. What the Report proposes does not meet this criterion. On the one hand the New Testament provides strong support for marriage as a monogamous cross-gender institution, and also **no** support for a same-sex marital institution. Indeed, the very word which St. Paul uses for ‘homosexual practice’ means to violate the marital bed.

**Appendices**

**A. ‘The Form of Solemization of Matrimony’ in *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 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’ 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.

**B. ‘Declaration of Purpose’ in ‘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 ore 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.

**C. Marriage Service in *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, discreetly, 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.’

**D. Marriage Service in *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 establishes 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.

**E. Marriage Service in *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.

**F. Pastoral Introduction in the 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

**G. Preface in the 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.