

## THE ANGLICAN UNDERSTANDING OF NATURAL AND SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE

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- A. A proper judgment upon the Anglican understanding of marriage will be formed less from speculative writing than from the formularies of the Church itself. The liturgy of marriage contains our formal doctrine.
- B. The Anglican understanding of marriage, in this formal sense, does not differ markedly in the Anglican Communion from that enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. Differences are of emphasis only, not of substance. Roman Catholic members of the Commission are invited, therefore, to study the Form of Solemnization of Marriage in the Prayer Book of 1662, comparing it, if they will, with the version of 1928, where changes of style were embodied, but none of substance. I would be prepared to expound the marriage service orally before the Commission if so desired, declaring in what sense we have received and used it. In this paper I select only elements related to the subject assigned to me.
- C. The opening address by the Priest to the Congregation describes Holy Matrimony as
1. "an honourable estate,
  2. instituted in the time of man's innocency,
  3. signifying unto us the mystical Union that is betwixt Christ and his Church;
  4. which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee,
  5. and is commended of St Paul in holy writ to be honourable among all men, and therefore ..."

In these words, and in others in the rite itself where the substance of each clause is embodied in the prayers and recited in passages of Scripture, lies the fulness of our subject.

Marriage in the created order

- D. Clauses 1 and 2 reflect our understanding of marriage as partaking of "the order of nature", of God's natural creation. They reflect the Genesis

myth, to which Jesus appealed, and on which he based his own teaching, with the words "from the beginning of creation", Mark 10: 6. The words "honourable" and "innocency" point to marriage as part of God's primal ordinance or gift for man, as something essentially or in itself good, and not as a remedial consequence of the Fall. The remedial function, man being fallen, is asserted later, in the second of the "causes for which Matrimony was ordained":

6. "Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body."

But as a natural ordinance, marriage is part of pure creation; its soteriological function is secondary. The same primary emphasis on the order of creation is found in the prayers: the old nuptial benediction from the Sacramentaries, for instance, went into the 1549 Book in two parts, of which this is the first:

7. "O God, who by thy mighty power hast made all things of nothing, who also (after other things set in order) didst appoint, that out of man (created after thine own Image, and similitude) woman should take her beginning: and knitting them together didst teach, that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom thou by Matrimony hadst made one: ..."

The final blessing of bride and bridegroom before the Mass or Sermon also began:

8. "Almighty God who at the beginning did create our first parents Adam and Eve, and did sanctifie and ioyn them together in marriage: ..."

E. This location of marriage in the order of Creation would seem formally to exclude it from the category of sacraments "as generally necessary for salvation" as defined in the Catechism (also in the Book of Common Prayer) and in the Thirty-Nine Articles.

F. The Catechism has an appendix on the sacraments, added to the 1549/1552 book in 1604, but based on Nowell's Catechism of 1570, and it begins thus:

9. "Q. How many Sacraments hath Christ ordained in his Church?  
A. Two only, as generally necessary to salvation, that is to say, Baptism, and the supper of the Lord."

In answer to the next question, "What meanest thou by this word, Sacrament?", follows

10. "A. I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and

- spiritual grace, given unto us,
11. ordained by Christ himself,
  12. as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

The catechizing which follows covers only Baptism and the Holy Communion.

G. As a natural ordinance, therefore, grounded in the Creation, marriage would appear to be excluded from this definition and enumeration of the sacraments; first, by its being ordained, not "by Christ himself" (11), but in Creation; and secondly by the rooting of the sacraments in the dispensation of "salvation" (9), in the order of redemption.

H. Article XXV of the XXXIX Articles of 1562 is consistent with this:

13. "There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.
14. "Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, ... Matrimony, ... are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being ... partly ... states of life allowed in the Scriptures;
15. but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained by God."

I. It is chiefly on this relation of the "two" to the "five" that differences of emphasis lie within the Anglican Communion. My personal interest is two-fold: it is, first, to do justice to the texts themselves which, fairly interpreted, I believe, can only yield an intention to restrict the Sacraments to two; it is, secondly, by further exegesis of the Liturgy, to show how it contains within itself a theology which fully justifies the limited use of a sacramental terminology for marriage by those who wish to use it - limited, because when the full technicalities of formal analysis of a sacrament are applied to marriage, language is inevitably stretched and the exercise reveals itself as artificial. In my own view, the extension of the language is unnecessary: the language of covenant, employed extensively in the liturgy, gives us all the theology we need to meet the requirements sought in the language of sacramentality. It is my further belief that this language of covenant provides a meeting-point with the conciliar documents of Vatican II (Gaudium et Spes, n. 48) and with the relevant parts of the Lex

Ecclesiae Fundamental founded upon them.

Marriage in the "Sacramental" order

J. My route to this is in clause 3 of the priest's opening address, with its implicit reference to St Paul's writing in Ephesians 5: 25 - 32, a passage quoted in full later in the homily to be read by the priest "if there be no sermon", and woven also into the major prayer of nuptial benediction.

After the opening section quoted at 7 above, the prayer continues:

16. "O God who hast consecrated the State of Matrimony to such an excellent Mystery, that in it is signified, and represented the spiritual Marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church; look mercifully upon these thy servants, that both this man may love his wife according to thy word, (as Christ did love his Spouse the Church, who gave himselfe for it, loving and cherishing it even as his own flesh) and alsoe that this woman may be loving and amiable, faithfull and obedient to her husband, ..."

K. The link between this passage in Ephesians and sacramentality is in the word "mystery", translated in the Vulgate by sacramentum. Ephesians 5: 32: to misterion touto mega estin; Vulg: sacramentum hoc magnum est. The transition of sacramentum appears to have been from the (early) "preliminary engagement entered into by an enlisting soldier" to the (very frequent and classical) equivalence of iusiurandum, "the military oath of allegiance", to the (mostly post-Augustan) general notion of "an oath, solemn obligation or undertaking" - the usage which it constantly carried in the administrative Latin of the medieval Church; thence, in the developing ecclesiastical Latin, it came to include "something to be kept sacred", and so to a "secret", a "mystery", the "type" conveyed in mysterious teaching, the Gospel revelation, a "bond" (Cyprian, de unitate), the sign of the cross; and then to "sacrament" in the developed sense - signa, cum ad res divinas pertinent, sacramenta appellantur (Aug., Ep. 138). After this its history becomes part of the history of sacramental terminology and theology in general, the elaboration and definition of which by the end of the fifteenth century caused the Reformers to react against it in ways indicated above.

L. The two ingredients of sacramentum relevant to our purpose are (a) the shewing or disclosure of a mystery as the saving act of God himself, in

mysterion in Ephesians 5; and (b) the notion of a bond created by an oath derived from the sacramentum tradition in Latin use. My belief is that the Liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, and hence the Anglican doctrine of marriage, enshrines both: (a) the "saving act" of God, inherent in the Ephesians pattern, whereby marriage, originating in the order of creation, is taken also into the order of salvation or redemption by incorporation into the concept of the body of Christ, the Church; and (b) the affirmation of the necessary bond, created by the oath, in the language of "vow and covenant" in which the marriage bond is described. This is apparent in the prayer said immediately after the giving and receiving of the ring (and adapted from the Sarum blessing of the ring) :

17. "... so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made ..."

The prayers and homilies, in fact, reflect the two poles within which I have set this exposition of doctrine - the grounding back in creation, with reference to God as "the creator and preserver of all mankind", and the pointing forward to the attainment of everlasting life, by the faithful keeping of themselves as "undefiled members of Christ's body" by ~~the~~ living faithfully within the vow and covenant made between them. The function of grace and of the Holy Spirit in this is frequently asserted. The Homily on The State of Matrimony, published in 1562 (and another of the Church's formularies, though a lesser one), speaks of marriage that

18 "It is instituted of God, to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendly fellowship, ..."

It speaks of

19. "this godly knot, once begun between you".

It urges that

20. "married persons must apply their minds in most earnest wise to concord, and must crave continually of God the help of his Holy Spirit, so to rule their hearts and to knit their minds together, that they be not dis severed by any division of discord."

The Permanence of the Marriage Bond

M. The practice of the Church of England agrees with its formularies in attaching the mark of permanence (as well as of exclusiveness) to "natural" marriage, marriage in the order of creation, as well as to "sacramental" marriage, that is marriage in the order of redemption. In this it accords

with the word of Jesus in Mark 10: 6, "From the beginning ...", reflected in the reference to Adam and Eve in the blessing, quoted at no. 8. It follows necessarily that the Church of England accepts as valid and binding any marriage, even of the unbaptized, regularly contracted by the free exchange of consent before the civil registrar. The "covenant" interpretation of marriage, following St Paul, grounds marriage in the covenant relation of God with Israel and of Christ with the Church: husbands are called upon to exhibit towards their wives the faithfulness of God in his covenant with Israel, and of Christ in his new covenant with the Church. Marriage is thus a "sign" to the world, in terms which the world can see and understand, of the "mystery" (sacramentum) of that invisible divine covenant, revealed in Christ. And as the Reformers spoke of sacraments as signa exhibitiva, signs exhibiting or making apparent the invisible Christ, a more than exemplary significance may be read into the reference to "Christ's presence and first miracle (sēmeion) that he wrought in Cana of Galilee", in the priest's opening address to the congregation. The "sacramental" balance of the Church's doctrine is thus, I believe, obliquely maintained. The abandonment of the marriage covenant is thus an abandonment of witness to the divine covenant, a form of apostasy from Christ.

N. The coinherence of the two covenants is demonstrated in the rubric, dating from 1662,

21. "It is convenient that new married persons should receive the Holy Communion at the time of their marriage, or at the first opportunity after their marriage."

The original form of the rubric in 1549 was:

22. "The new married persons (the same day of their Marriage) must receive the holy Communion."

In 1601 the vicar of Pocklington, Yorks., was censured at a Visitation for omitting the Communion service at a wedding.

O. It should be added that, in the 1928 Revision of the Prayer Book, references to Adam and Eve, and to other Old Testament characters and precedents, were removed, partly because the Church, still in retreat before the critics of Genesis as being unhistorical and unscientific, had not yet formulated an adequate valuation and interpretation of "myth" with which to defend the Genesis stories; and partly from a desire to reduce what was felt to be verbosity in the prayers. These verbal reductions are

not of such significance as to undermine the theology of creation on which the whole service rests; and in any case the 1928 Book is not a formulary of the Church, despite its extensive and, in some respects, well-deserved popularity.

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