

# **Marriage and Sexuality: A Reflection**

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## **Reasons for Writing This Reflection.**

The 2019 Conference of the Methodist Church approved for consultation a report entitled 'God in Love Unites Us', the principle conclusion of which is that the Methodist Church should approve a change in the Marriage Service to permit the marriage of people of the same gender (Same-sex Marriage). In the opinion of this writer, the Report is significantly flawed and my reflection on it, as an anthropologist and theologian, seeks to point out issues and concerns. It is not meant to be a point-by-point commentary, but rather a reflection on the major points of the report.

## **Summary of Concerns.**

- 1) The Report, surprisingly, provides no definition of marriage as a benchmark for its discussions, although definitions of many forms of sexuality are given. (See Section 1 of these comments).
- 2) The Report gives no evidence that the ethnographic understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage were considered. (See Section 1 of these comments).
- 3) The Report gives little evidence that it has examined reviews of scientific work done in the area of genetics, behaviour, and choice. (See Section 2 of these comments).
- 4) The seemingly minor alteration which is proposed in the rubric of the marriage ceremony from 'a man and a woman' to 'two people' raises the possibility of further changes in the character of the marriage ceremony and in sexual behaviour. (See Section 4 of these comments).

## **1. Definition of Marriage.**

The Report states at the beginning that the Task Group had been given the remit to produce a report on changes to Standing Orders 'were the definition of marriage to change'. This is the key issue. 'Marriage' is a social institution (a social practice recognised by law and/or custom) and therefore a 'category of analysis' for social research. It has a definition which cannot be altered any more than say the definition of 'divorce' could be altered. It has a specific reference. Social institutions have specific purposes; this is true regardless whether the individual, practiced relationships within them are benevolent or not. The report gives extensive discussion of how the Methodist Church's understanding of 'marriage' has changed over the years (Section 3.1 'Our developing theology of marriage'), but the changes tracked in the review are not changes in the *definition* of marriage, but of the *character* of the relationships between the husband and wife. What then ethnographically is the definition of marriage ?

### **a. Universality of the Institution.**

Marriage is a world-wide, historic social institution which has been imbedded in the social life of all cultures for millennia. There have been references to marriage ever since written records have been kept. Marriage is not specifically a religious institution - indeed a Christian institution, although all major religions including Christianity support the institution by providing a ritual formalisation of the practice, and provide a theological or religious understanding of it.

### **b. Character and Purpose of Marriage.**

Anthropologically, marriage has been defined as ‘a legally and socially sanctioned union between one or more husbands and one or more wives that accords status to their offspring and is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners.’ (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1991), v. 7, p. 871). This definition, which may be taken to be typical of the anthropological understanding of the nature of ‘marriage’, indicates that the pan-human institution of marriage is founded upon a relationship between a man and a woman essentially for the procreation and upbringing of children within the context of a unit – the family – which is sanctioned by law and/or custom. Marriage is thus rooted in the family as the core institution of any society.

The second point to note in this definition is that it implies that there are rituals (legal and social means of sanctioning marriage) which formally create, establish, or confirm the marital relationship.

### **c. Forms of Marriage.**

Ethnographically, marriage exists in a wide range of forms – monogamy (single partners of each sex), and polygamy which is in two forms - polygyny (single husband, multiple wives), polyandry (single wife, multiple husbands), and is set within an equally wide range of family descent structures – patrilineal, matrilineal, bi-lateral, and so on. The key point is that whatever the specific features of marriage in different societies are, it is a physical and social union between male and female.

No contemporary or historical society of which I am aware has or has had an institution of formalised same-sex relations which is or was seen to be equivalent to or part of the institution of marriage.

### **d. New Testament Comments on Marriage.**

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. This is disingenuous. It is quite clear from the remarks in the New Testament that it refers to a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman. 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. However, when challenged by some Sadducees about marital relations at the resurrection, He indicated the situation would be different (*St. Matthew* 22: 23-33), that is, who we are is not determined by our bodily form. This conforms with the teaching in *Genesis* 1: 26 where God says ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness’. Our worth comes not from any physical or behavioural characteristics of our own but from the fact that we are in essence ‘in the image of God’ – a very powerful statement.

Section 2.3.3 concludes by saying, ‘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 is a misleading statement for it implies that the only reason things did not change was because of a millenarian theology. I doubt this for two reasons. Firstly, monogamous heterosexual marriage was a moral value to be upheld and had nothing to do with the imminence or otherwise of the Second Coming of Christ.

Secondly, by the end of the first century substantial numbers of Christians were of Greek or Latin culture, which both emphasised and valued marriage as a cross-gender monogamous institution. Earlier in the first century the Emperor Augustus had made strenuous efforts to restore traditional Roman values which had to do with monogamy and fidelity. Heterosexual monogamy was a universal value regardless of whether Christians were of Jewish, Greek, or Roman ethnic origin.

It is also relevant here to consider the etymology of another term, *matrimony*. This word derives from the Latin word *matrimonium* meaning 'marriage'. The key element is *matri* meaning *mater* or 'mother'. In other words, the Latin word refers to a union in which the woman is or will be a 'mother'. *Matrimonium* is a cross-gender, legally recognised institution for the purpose of creating a family through procreation. This sense has been carried over into the English word.

**Consequently in Jewish, Greek, and Roman culture – the culture of the New Testament era, marriage is a cross-gender, monogamous institution.**

#### **e. Christian Understanding of Marriage.**

The understanding of marriage in the Methodist Church is a religious and Christian recognition of the universal anthropological and historical facts of marriage. Point 3 in *The Methodist Service Book* (1975, p. E4) in describing the purpose of marriage states that it 'is given by God' and that it is the teaching of Christ that 'marriage is the life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman'. Point 4 in the Marriage Service in the *Methodist Worship Book* (1999, p. 369) makes the same points in rephrased language. This teaching and the wording of the ritual of marriage derives from the liturgy in *The Prayer Book of King Edward VI* of 1549 (The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature, p. 233). The rubrics are quite clear in both Methodist and Anglican liturgical books that the institution is cross-gender, *and* between only one member of each sex. **That is, cross-gender, monogamous marriage is the standard for marriage in a Christian context.**

The particular Christian understanding of marriage ultimately derives from certain texts in the Old Testament, notably *Genesis* 1: 26-27 and *Genesis* 2: 18-24. Verse 24, as a commentary on the whole passage in the second chapter, indicates that marriage is both cross-gender and the origin of the nuclear family, the building block of all social institutions. The Old Testament, not surprisingly, gives abundant historical evidence of polygamous practices. However in the Inter-testamental Period rabbinic teaching stressed monogamy as the ideal, and this was the case in the time of Jesus.

#### **f. Changes in the Christian Understanding of Marriage ?**

Although the Report in section 3.3 discusses 'Marriage as a social and legal institution', it ignores any discussion of the historic and ethnographic meaning of the institution of marriage. It states in section 3.3.1 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.**

The table 'Changes in the expressed purpose of marriage within Methodist liturgy' in the Report (p. 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 review of the rubrics from the various books of liturgy does *not* give any evidence of a change in the *definition* of what marriage is, but shows 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.

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

#### **g. Recent Legal Changes to Marriage Rites.**

With the passage of The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 by Parliament, permission was granted to couples of the same gender to be married, but exceptions were made in the case of religious institutions based upon religious beliefs and teaching.

The principal problem with the Act is that it does not provide a definition of marriage, and yet because it *does permit* the marriage of people of the same gender the law has in effect changed the definition of marriage and consequently the nature of the institution itself. The conclusion of the Report parallels this view.

In the secular world, we are now in the peculiar situation of performing a ritual to create a formal social relationship which has no precise definition. That is, there is the historic definition of marriage in principle, and an *ad hoc* definition based on practice. The absence of any precise definition of marriage implies that the inclusion of same-sex relations within 'marriage' is solely a matter of *the extension of the use of the term* to make same-sex relationships equivalent to cross-gender relationships. It is this view which leads supporters of same-sex marriage to argue for 'equal marriage', and for Anglican clerical activists such as Andrew Foresheew-Cain to refer to the Church of England's 'ban on same-sex weddings.' **Extension of the definition of the term 'marriage' to cover same-sex relationships effectively changes the definition. 'Marriage' becomes something other than its historic and universal definition.**

#### **h. Ambiguity in Church Practice.**

The Methodist advocacy group Dignity and Worth which promotes same-sex marriage issued a pamphlet *Getting to the Mixed Economy* (p. 6) which suggests that there are three positions regarding same-sex marriage – 1) the uncomfortable fudge, 2) winner takes all, and 3) the mixed economy where both practices are permitted. Their preference is for position 3) where there is both the permission for the practice of same-sex marriage and a get-out clause for those who in conscience cannot conduct a same-sex marriage. This is the view taken by the Report in its conclusion in section 4, the penultimate section, 'Widening the practice of marriage'. The title of this section is misleading because what is proposed is not a minor tinkering, a resolution of an anomaly, but a complete change in the definition of a term, and therefore of a social institution. The proposal put forward in the Report itself does not resolve the issue of the ambiguity in the nature of marriage, but compounds it. **The church cannot simultaneously recognise two definitions of marriage. There must be a single definition of what we mean by 'marriage'.**

#### **i. A Faithful Change ?**

Given the fact that there has been an historic, universally recognised definition of marriage in both the secular and religious spheres, it must be shown why the change proposed in the Report should be made in the first place.

In section 4.3.20, the Report states that the 'Church cannot remain true to the God of justice and love by continuing to deny it (marriage) to those same-sex couples who desire it so deeply', and in section 4.3.21 states that the faithfulness of people who cannot accept the views of the report must be respected. While welcoming the intent of section 4.3.21, it is the wording of 4.3.20 which is problematic. The section begins, 'Consequently, we believe that, in awe and humility, the Methodist Church needs to recognise that it is being called by God to take the next steps in the development of its understanding of relationships and marriage'. This means principally the approval of same-sex marriage.

Particularly troubling is the use of the words 'in awe and humility' which implies that there has been a new revelation from God about the definition of marriage. Why was this truth not revealed before? Why does it contradict practices approved in Scripture? Does this statement mean that our previous practices have been wrong? Are people who say and believe that marriage is between a man and a woman morally in error?

**The Report has not proved its case, and in fact has offered no definition of marriage, and has ignored ethnographic research which contradicts its conclusions.**

A final point, to which I will return is that the ambiguity in the definition of marriage essentially destabilises the institution itself, and opens up further changes in 'marital' arrangements about which I will discuss in Section 4.

## **2. Human Sexuality.**

The hottest of 'hot potatoes' in modern society is understanding human sexuality. However, sexual behaviour is one of the two forms of organic reproduction – sexual and a-sexual reproduction. Sexual reproduction involves a relationship between two genders, male and female. The individual human body being mammalian is either male or female. This fact accounts for the historic development of family and social structures which nurture and protect human young.

**The fact that sexual behaviour has been engaged in for reasons other than reproduction, or that there may be individual cases of imperfect physical development does not abrogate the fact of the dimorphic nature of the human body, and the biological purpose of sex.**

### **a. Genetic Determinism or Choice ?**

People who have argued for the acceptance of LGBTI+ people initially argued, for example in the case of Lesbians and Gays, that it was a matter of 'gender preference' – implying an element of choice. The arguments have now developed so that it is a matter of genetic determination. That is, the sexual behaviour of LGBTI+ people is a result of their genetic make-up – implying a low level of choice, if any.

One of the most important contributions of anthropology has been the refutation of the link which had been made historically between the bodily form of people in different parts of the world and their behaviour and their culture. This idea was called in the nineteenth century the Psychic Unity of Mankind, i.e., all people of whatever ethnic group had the same mental abilities. This concept became the basis of the anthropological rejection of the concept of 'race' and therefore of 'racism'. The variability of human behaviour/culture, the variation of different patterns of social and sexual behaviour was well established by the empirical school of anthropology under Franz Boas in the United States and by British social anthropologists. There is no inherent connection between a complex form of human behaviour such as a language and a person's outward bodily form (skin

colour, facial shape, etc.). These observations and others have made the concept of 'race' a discredited category of academic discourse.

One of the problems with the current discourse about human sexuality is that it is creating categories of humanity based upon human behaviour which is justified by the assumption that sexual behaviour has been fixed by the individual's genetic composition. This gets dangerously close to nineteenth century concepts of 'race'. **This genetic explanation, used to explain a wide range of human behaviour, raises important ethical and religious issues of responsibility and free will.**

There now appears to be a popularly held (assumed ?) idea that there is a single gene or genetic structure which explains an individual's or a group's behaviour. Denis Alexander in *Genes, Determinism and God* (Cambridge UP, 2017) reviews decades of research on the debate of 'nature versus nurture' – i.e., are we the way we are because we're made that way or because we've learned to be that way? Current genetic research shows that not only is there not a monogenetic explanation for a discrete form of human behaviour, but that there is a very complex relationship between genetics and the environment. The latter element means not only the complex social environment into which a person is born and raised, but also the genetic and biological environment itself. Two terms are used to describe this method of analysis - DICI (developmental integrated complementary interactionism) and DAME (developmental dual-aspect monistic emergentism). These terms are used to describe a complex interplay of factors which means that with regard to human behaviour it is not possible to point to a single factor giving rise to a certain form of behaviour. Alexander's book, one of several recent works on this subject, has chapters on research conducted into various forms of behaviour, including human sexuality. This contemporary biological research confirms a century of anthropological research which illustrated the variability and mutability of human behaviour.

Discussion about human sexuality has been framed in terms of discrimination against a group which is patterned after concepts of racial discrimination, creating categories of humanity parallel to 'race'. Consequently, all views on the issue of sexuality are seen through the lens of the human rights of a discriminated group. This view makes it practically impossible to discuss questions of human sexuality as behaviour. It specifically means that to reject the extension of the term 'marriage' to a same-sex relationship is seen to be bigotry and the denial of human rights. **This is not the case, in my view.**

#### **b. Relationships and Sex.**

Section 1.4 of the Report, 'Made to relate as sexual beings', is crucial to the proposals of the Report as it uses definitions of 'sex' and 'gender' to move away from the biological understanding of gender and sexual behaviour. In Section 1.4.6, it refers to an earlier report which observed that 'some parts of the Christian tradition have seen sexual activity as essentially related to procreation'. This statement as used in the context of the paragraph in question is extraordinary. The purpose of sexual activity *is* for procreation. The various parts of the body serve a function. For example, the hand has the function of grasping and holding, while the feet are designed for the human body to be erect while in motion. The arms of some types of apes, however, are long so that they can brachiate through the trees, while the structure of their feet does not allow them to walk erect for long periods of time. The male and female human sexual organs (as all mammalian sexual organs) are complementary and serve the primary purpose of reproduction. The statement quoted from the earlier report is extraordinary because it implies that a strange view was held by a minority (??) of Christians that sexual activity was about reproduction. **The**

**view expressed in paragraph 1.4.6 moves away from empirical science into the realms of ‘philosophy’.**

Likewise, paragraph 1.4.7 refers to a contemporary theologian, Susannah Cornwall, who says that ‘fertile, potentially procreative sex, which made good sense when communities were small and the human species was at risk of being wiped out’ no longer makes sense. If this statement is an accurate representation of her ideas, it is strange. It implies that there are various kinds of sex. Indeed the Report states that she rejects the special status given in theology to ‘fertile penetrative sex between a male and a female’. Statements such as this move beyond empirical science as to the purpose of sex. **The fact that the human sexual organs may be used in a variety of ways does not abrogate the fact that male and female sexual organs have a primary reproductive function.**

### **c. Scriptural Commentary on Sexual Behaviour.**

Sections 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.1.2 cite various passages from Scripture to indicate both the ambiguity of Scripture and how the passages quoted do not reflect current scientific knowledge. One passage cited is *1 Corinthians* 6: 9 -10, which is part of a larger section in the text of Paul’s letter which highlights a number of actions and deeds which are contrary to Christian values and behaviour. Among people whose behaviour is condemned are ‘male prostitutes’ and ‘homosexual offenders’ (NIV translation). In the Greek, Paul refers to μαλακοί (catamites), and ἀρσενοκοῖται, which is usually translated as ‘homosexuals’. This latter term is a compound noun composed of ‘ἀρσενο’ meaning male and ‘κοῖται’ which means the marital bed. Clearly, Paul sees male homosexual practice as contrary to male-female marital relations. It is a violation of the marital bed.

In discussing *Romans* 1: 26 – 27, the Report correctly states that this paragraph, at the beginning Paul’s letter, is concerned with idolatry, but then goes on to assert that Paul’s views on homosexuality ‘no longer accords with what is known today about human nature’. This statement itself is at variance with decades of research on human behaviour which rejects single-gene determination and points up the complexity of genetic and environmental determinism, which in turn supports the idea of the potential for individual choice. See Section 2.a above in this commentary.

**The point of Paul’s comments is that these sexual practices and all the other practices which he condemns distract the person from his/her relationship with God.**

### **3. Dignity and Worth**

The Methodist activist group Dignity and Worth’s proposal to have a ‘mixed economy’ does not resolve the issue of same-sex marriage because the Church would be saying two different things about the very nature of marriage. We cannot have two totally different theological and social understandings of the same ritual or institution. Also, if we accept the view of the Report we must accept a *de facto* definition (without a definition being given) and alter the wording of the ritual of marriage to encompass same-sex relations. We are then in the bizarre situation of either having two definitions, or one undefined ‘definition’ which excludes the traditional, historic and universal definition.

The key issue in this whole debate is pinpointed by Dignity and Worth who want assurance of ‘who they really are’, in a commonly used phrase. If we seek to ensure that we give dignity and worth to LGBTI+ people, if they wish to know what the basis of their dignity and their worth is, it is not found in any form of behaviour, sexual or otherwise. Their dignity and worth - as is anyone’s,

is that they are created in the image of God. This fact is the rock, the foundation of how we understand who and what we are. The Report itself makes this point in Section 1.1., 'Made in God's Image', but then veers off at the end in 1.4.1., 'Made to relate as sexual beings'. This section implies that sexuality is *the* defining characteristic of who we are, that is, sexual behaviour defines us. This goes too far. **The key relationship must be our relationship to God.**

Section 1.4.1. is followed by a glossary of various forms of sexuality, but omits to provide any definition of either 'marriage' or 'love'. In particular, the lack of a definition for love means that the Report conflates three things - human sexual activity, love and compassion for others, and God's love. As commentators well know, Greek has three words which are translated as 'love' in English – ερως for sexual or erotic love, φιλος for the fond concern for another based on an existing social relationship, and αγαπε for God's unconditional love or Grace. It is the latter two Greek terms which define our relationship to God, and to other people. *1 John 3* makes this point. We are children of God. We pray this every time we pray the Lord's Prayer – 'Our Father in Heaven', we acknowledge that we are His children and that we are all linked together as a family. **Being made in the image of God, being His children is what gives us dignity and worth – nothing else.**

#### **4. Social Problems in Accepting the Report's Proposals.**

##### **a. Novel Forms of Marriage.**

Accepting the idea of same-sex marriage cannot be seen separately from the impact which these practices would have on other aspects of our social and moral life. The fact that there is no agreed definition of marriage put forward in the Report means that other practices not now permitted would become acceptable, and consequently included under either Christian or civil marriage.

For example, the Report states in the third bullet point (pp. 119-120) of the Conclusions that 'We offer to the Methodist Church a theological reflection on marriage as a particular form of 'gospel' relationship between two persons, and propose that we take steps to enable same-sex couples to get married in the Methodist Church'. The report suggests that in the rubrics explaining marriage in CPD and the marriage liturgy, the phrase 'two people' be substituted for the existing phrase 'a man and woman'. If this phrase can be changed so easily, what will prevent a later Task Group from substituting the phrase 'anyone' for the phrase 'two people'. Why limit marriage to just two people? If the cross-gender aspect of marriage has been dispensed with, what prevents the monogamous relationship also being discarded? **Cross-gender, monogamous marriage has always been the Christian standard for marriage since the era of the New Testament.**

To take another case, if a bisexual person or persons were to marry, what are the perimeters of that kind of marriage? If the marriage is to be monogamous, will it be acceptable to have an extra-marital partner? Do we reject the Seventh Commandment (adultery) because society has 'moved on'? On what basis do we reject this historic teaching? If there are three or more persons in the marriage, on what basis do we reject monogamy for some form of polygamy? **Some of Jesus's most stringent teaching was about marriage, and His teaching reflected and implied its monogamous character.**

As the case above illustrates, if we can have one form of polygamous marriage why not other forms? Why not a man with multiple wives, or a woman with multiple husbands? This result would be a reversion to practices which, in a Judaeo-Christian context, disappeared before the time of Christ. **Heterosexual monogamous marriage creates conditions for the equality of both partners and provides stability for the whole family unit.**



### **b. Other Sexual Practices.**

In the lead-up to Parliament's approval of the legalisation for same-sex marriage, one of the reasons given was that anyone should be able to marry anyone whom they love. This simple statement is an appealing slogan, but it is deceptive. If the concept of marriage is broadened out, how will this affect our understanding of other forms of sexual activity? Anthropologically, the *tabu* against incest is considered to be an historic, universal prohibition of sexual activity between members of a family other than marital couples. Given changes in other areas of sexual activity in contemporary society, on what basis would we draw a ring of protection around the prohibition of incest? We must remember that Paul castigated the Corinthians for condoning an incestuous relationship - and for being proud of it (*1 Corinthians* 5: 1-13). Is this not a warning to us? Will a future Task Group say in a report that 'in awe and humility' we must recognise that God is leading us on to a deeper understanding of incest? In other words, St. Paul got it wrong and contemporary values take priority.

### **c. Sexuality, Science and Documentary Records.**

An individual's sense of identity based upon their sexual identity (sexuality) is the key issue in this debate. It is my belief, following a long theological tradition, that our identity does not derive from our sexual or any other kind of behaviour but from the fact that as human beings we are created in the 'image of God' as stated above. Transgenderism raises some particular concerns for theology, for scientific research, and for documentary records. Recently some transgender people have approached members of the Anglican clergy for baptism because they were afraid that God would not know them in their new form. Anyone with these fears should be reassured that God already knows them however they have changed physically. Psalm 139 assures us that God has known us from the very beginning – therefore, He will know us until the end, and beyond.

Transgenderism also raises specific concerns for scientific research. If anyone has been re-assigned to another gender, how will they be considered for the purposes of biological, medical and social scientific research? In each of these three cases, it is essential that the birth gender be known and not erased as is being urged by some transgender advocates. The fact that they have had their gender re-assigned is a significant fact for research in all three of these areas of science. If it is important that the birth gender be known (in addition to the re-assigned gender) then it is important that any previous records not be altered to reflect the re-assigned gender. To do so would have a massive impact on, for example, historical, medical, and sociological and anthropological research. Among those types of records which should not be altered are baptismal and marriage records. They are an important historical statement and should not be altered or adjusted for any reason.

The issue mentioned above is not a hypothetical one. In mid-July, 2019, newspapers reported the case of a transgender man (a woman who transitioned to being a male) who did not want his name given as 'mother' on the birth certificate of the child whom he bore. This raises the issue of the serious distortion of empirical medical and sociological information. Again it points up the same issue raised with same-sex marriage. Our identity, our value, our worth does not derive from race, gender, social status or any other form of manmade identity. In *Galatians* 3: 28 Paul assures his readers that in God's eyes none of these distinctions applies. **It is in the relationship with God where our worth lies.**

### **Final Thoughts.**

We have to think about what the end result would be if a dramatic change were made in the nature of marriage. In the Introduction, the Report in Section 0.2.2 asserts that 'the Methodist Church must engage with the reality of how people are living today'. This statement is a truism in that the Report means we have to know what the context of modern society is. But it should *not* mean that we have to adjust our Christian thinking to be aligned always with things which are acceptable in the current age. We would be constantly running to keep up and with nothing to say to contemporary society. The Church must speak prophetically to its time, basing its comments on the traditions and teachings of Christianity grounded in the Bible.

Regarding the tampering with the meaning of words, there is a clear warning in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where the Ministry of Truth is continually redefining words to suit the current views of the State and the Party. The Church must never be in a situation where this is the case. The Church is called to speak prophetically to its age, and not simply acquiesce in current trends. We need to know and understand the spirit of the age, but we must not simply follow it.

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