

A summary of the RESPONSE (dated 3/7/2014) by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations to the UCA ASSEMBLY PAPERS on MARRIAGE and SAME GENDER RELATIONSHIPS (issued May 12, 2014): The full response is available from the Assembly of Confessing Congregations.

(Document 1) Discussion Paper on Marriage: The theology of marriage in the Uniting Church in Australia: a commentary on the marriage service in Uniting in Worship 2.

It is disappointing that this crucial paper by the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine (AWDG) does not compare the Marriage Service in *Uniting in Worship 2* (UW2) with UW1 or draw on the liturgies of UCA's ecumenical partners, particularly those with whom joint statements on marriage have been produced (eg Roman Catholic Church 1999). By uncritically accepting UW2 as the benchmark of the Christian doctrine of marriage it deprives us of the richness of other covenantal and sacramental approaches to marriage.

It is encouraging to see that, despite its failure to see the liturgical softening of UW2; the Discussion Paper acknowledges the link between Genesis 1 and Ephesians 5 and insists that 'the foundational importance of these scriptural passages cannot be dismissed.' Moreover, in a passage that invites further reflection, it says 'If ever the Uniting Church was to re-define marriage to include same-gender partnerships, it would remain theologically impossible to bypass this deep scriptural tradition in which male-female duality and male-female union are located right near the heart of the divine purpose.' **(No 13 'Scriptural language')**

► Since the establishment of the Sexuality Task Group at the Seventh Assembly (1994) there has been a reluctance to give account of the complex biological, sociological, psychological and volitional factors that influence same-gender attraction. Despite this, arguments are still put forward on the unstated and unexamined assumption that, like ethnicity, it is biologically determined (immutable). This has had the effect of falsely treating opposition to homosexuality and same-gender marriage as a form of racism. This fiction has been maintained to obtain public support from people who, otherwise, would be horrified to think that, unlike ethnicity, choice and discipline are essential aspects of forming sexual relationships. This is recognised in the homosexual community. Many people are adamant that they are not 'hardwired,' as the paper states **(No 9)**, but have chosen to undermine heterosexism.

► It is disappointing that the paper doesn't consider the theological and social implications of life-long unions between bisexual and transgender partners. Presumably companionship is possible in these, and many other forms of sexual partnership, but the use of 'same-gender marriage' would seem to exclude both groups, something that an inclusive church would be loath to accept.

In this regard, it is surprising that the paper does not discuss its use of 'same-gender' rather than 'same-sex,' to describe these relationships, particularly when the latter is more common in public debate. Is the term 'same gender relationships' used here and in Assembly resolution 12.31 to soften for public consumption the actual context of homosexual sexual activity?

(Document 2) Views of Marriage in the UCA - Report on a consultation process - 2013 (by Robert Bos)

► The Report states the obvious. There have been diverse marriage customs between and within communities through the ages and strong differences of opinion today in the UCA and other churches on sexual relationships in general and same-gender marriage in particular. But it doesn't provide accurate, research-based evidence for its findings. Nor does it articulate the theological, social and personal grounds on which people disagree. The impression is given that 'enlightenment' moves from narrow, exclusivist Biblicism and cultural primitivism to open, inclusive love. The conclusion (p24) unmasks the underlying prejudice that masquerades as objective research. Clearly, Robert Bos approves of the fact that among 'a wide range of views' 'many demonstrated openness to change and reviewing their position.' Thus the high moral ground is claimed, dissent by indigenous, migrant-ethnic and evangelical voices is discouraged, and the outcome skewed in favour of changing the UCA's doctrine of marriage.

The unstated assumption that theology is primarily the outworking of our diverse personal and social experience, rather than the articulation of the reality of God attested in Scripture, needs to be argued, particularly as it also determines whether the doctrine of the UCA on this and other fundamental matters is consistent with our confession of faith in the Basis of Union.

The Views of Marriage Report shares the presuppositions of the resolution at the Thirteenth Assembly (2012) and the way in which the consultations took place. Robert Bos' conclusion that 'A resource document on the theology of marriage which thoughtfully and fairly considered the issues, rather than seeking to persuade people to a particular point of view, would be well received,' (p24) is a pre-emptive strike for the 'particular point of view' that prizes diversity over Christ-centred unity.

The Report makes it clear that the issue will be decided, not by arguing from basic theological principles, but by the desire to accommodate incompatible beliefs about the sanctity of marriage. On a superficial reading, this will satisfy the ideology of diversity that pervades postmodern culture and the UCA. But, in practice, it will marginalise those who uphold orthodoxy. Once orthodox faith and doctrine is regarded as one form of diversity, it is inevitable that the ecumenical faith of the church attested in Scripture and affirmed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds will become optional.

(Document 3) Study Guide for Discussion Paper on Marriage

It is unfortunate that the Study Guide doesn't encourage deeper engagement with the Biblical and theological materials related to the sanctity of marriage, some of which are included in the Discussion Paper on Marriage.

A question could also have been asked about the statement in the *Discussion Paper on Marriage* that, 'It is clear that same-gender marriage is not simply about making marriage more inclusive, but about altering the definition of marriage.' (*Same-gender marriage* **(No 16)**)