

Why Australian Anglicans are Divided

Whatever their differences, all Australian Anglicans are bound by three Fundamental Declarations in their Constitution of 1960:

1. The Anglican Church of Australia, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church of Christ from primitive times ... as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.
2. This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.
3. This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

The Church's governing structures are synodical. General Synod has separate houses of bishops, clergy and laity. Each diocese has its own synod with separate houses of clergy and laity, the diocesan bishop having the power of executive veto. The Appellate Tribunal—an ecclesiastical high court—hears and determines appeals from provincial and diocesan synods over questions of faith, ritual, ceremonial and disciplinary matters specified by sections of the constitution.

In theory, this synodical structure mirrors the parliamentary system, giving the Church a democratic veneer. In practice, democratic governance is a risky way of protecting a cultural institution whose existence is counter-cultural. If the Fundamental Declarations are to be upheld, faithfully, Anglicans must maintain a tension between being in the world and remaining apart from the world, while resisting siren calls to conflate the two worlds. They must

resist the spirit of the age, particularly the lies of the culture, the deranging shifts in social mores and cultural norms driven by the sexual revolution, radical feminism, Cultural Marxism and identity politics.

In May 2022, General Synod considered marriage, human sexuality and same-sex relationships. A motion to affirm marriage as a heterosexual union between a man and a woman passed convincingly in the House of Laity (63 to 47), and the House of Clergy (70 to 39), but lost in the House of Bishops (10 to 12 with two abstentions) and failed to carry. A motion to affirm same-sex marriage was not put to the vote by houses and failed to carry (95 to 145). In the latter case, the motion was ambiguously worded, reading, in part:

The General Synod:

- (A) Welcomes the introduction of civil same-sex marriages ... as a way of recognising faithfulness, love and commitment;
- (B) Gives thanks for the public witness of Christian same-sex couples;
- (C) Notes the diversity of theological and legal viewpoints ... found among faithful, committed Anglicans who worship in all dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia;
- (D) Affirms that marriage is not considered a matter pertaining to salvation in this Church ...;
- (F) Acknowledges the continual evolution within the Church ... of its position on moral issues—such as slavery, capital punishment, interracial marriage, contraception, the equality of men and women—and the concomitant absence of any such moral injunctions in the historic creeds;
- (G) Considers same-sex marriage as a moral good and a gift to be celebrated, providing an enrichment of the Christian understanding of marriage and a witness to God's grace and love, consistent with the testimony of Scripture and Anglican tradition as expressed in the historic creeds.

Clause (D) refers to the Tribunal's view that the Church's doctrine of salvation is not involved in the institution of marriage. This does not infer a right of same-sex marriage in the constitution. It simply means the constitution is silent on the matter, leaving each diocese to address the issue for itself. This is the same attitude the Tribunal took towards women's ordination.

Why did the bishops veto the clergy's and laity's affirmation of marriage as a union between a biological male and a biological female? After all, this traditional view of marriage is both secular and religious, supported by the evidence of human evolution as well as biblical revelation. The view is essential to Christian anthropology, the theology of what being human (*anthropos*) means in relation to God.

The reason is that many High and Broad Church bishops confuse their churchmanship with their faith. They experience Low Church Evangelicalism as an existential threat. Some of them probably opposed the motion because they saw it as an Evangelical power grab by an already powerful Diocese of Sydney. Yet the Fundamental Declarations are not about churchmanship, they express the fundamentals of being Anglican.

Negative attitudes towards the Diocese of Sydney must be admitted openly and honestly. In twenty-first-century Australia, Sydney Anglicans are demonised as ultra-conservative, patriarchal and fundamentalist, although these terms are bandied about loosely to illustrate whatever point progressives wish to make. Those who take their faith seriously—who believe in its fundamentals—are not “fundamentalists” in the pejorative sense. An obvious Catholic equivalent is the tendency to demonise Cardinal George Pell as an all-purpose scapegoat. In the psychology of group formation, those identified as progressives need to oppose those identified as conservatives.

Why did 40 per cent of General Synod regard same-sex marriage as a moral good? The answer is found in the Church's seduction by the ideology of the sexual revolution, the lie that anyone can do anything—sexually—and nothing bad will happen to them or to society. The lie is promoted by elites (cultural, academic, political) because it keeps them in power, but it can only be sustained as long as the medical profession finds cures or treatments for the unwanted consequences of human sexual activity.

Take, for example, the emergence of monkeypox in the West. When the evidence pointed to the disease being sexually transmitted—overwhelmingly among men who have sex with men—the reflexive instinct was to protect the ideology of the sexual revolution as well as public health. The elites controlling the semiotics of culture are now as con-

cerned to protect men who have sex with men from conservatism of any kind, secular or religious, as they are to protect the population from disease. The motives are ideological.

The hyper-novelty of treating same-sex marriage as a moral good is only possible if Anglicans agree to sanctify and place before God's altar what happens behind closed doors. Yet making it acceptable to behave one way in public and another way in private merely institutionalises hypocrisy and cognitive dissonance. The issue here is twofold: first, whether Anglicans are allowed private lives where they can behave in ways incongruent with their Church's declared fundamentals; second, whether those fundamentals can be changed to align more closely with the lies of the culture.

A complicating factor is Anglicanism's struggle for relevance in a modern Australia which has rejected the Christian metanarrative and is struggling to fill a religion-shaped hole with a politically and ideologically driven hybrid of green eco-paganism, the indigenous dreamtime, the sexual revolution and the welfare state. The struggle revolves around attempts by progressives to turn Jesus into a social justice warrior who cures whatever they think ails the body politic. However, all attempts to adapt the Christian metanarrative to make Jesus a hero of diversity, equity and inclusion will fail. Jesus is not a cipher for the interests of progressive elites.

As a branch of the Church—One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic—Anglicans pride themselves on tolerance and diversity, without fully understanding their limits in relation to the Fundamental Declarations. The fundamentals of the Christian faith are immune from democratic interference and cannot be changed by majority vote. For example, the Vatican has issued *responsum ad dubia* addressing women's ordination and same-sex unions. The Orthodox Churches and the mainline Protestant denominations are of the same mind.

General Synod's failure to uphold the majority view of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and allowing each diocese to settle the same-sex marriage issue for itself, has brought the Anglican Church of Australia to a point of existential crisis. Those who believe the issue is purely about churchmanship, and think the real problem is the Diocese of Sydney, are trivialising what is at stake. The issue is really about the relationship between the biblical and evolutionary accounts of human anthropology, which intersect and overlap at several points.

To grasp what this means, Anglicans need to understand why same-sex marriage is tearing the Church apart in a way the ordination of women did not. The idea that sex and gender are functionally

independent, from each other and from evolutionary biology too, the belief that biological men can become biological women and vice versa, the denial of any biological or existential difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality, are all the wayward children of radical feminism and Cultural Marxism. The experiment with social constructionism has been pushed as far as it can go without detonating. It has failed terribly.

As Paul writes in Galatians 6:7: “Do not be deceived: God will not be mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.”

In March 1992, the Archbishop of Perth, Peter Carnley, ordained Australia’s first batch of women priests. In his ordination homily he used striking metaphors and feminist rhetoric. He said the ordination was about rescuing the suicidal woman, trapped in the attic, against her will, madly peeling away the yellowed wallpaper. What was beneath the metaphors and the rhetoric: justice, equality, freedom, the Gospel, clerical power, or just an unpapered wall?

Carnley saw himself as a hero rescuing women from oppression and striking a blow for female empowerment. In progressive circles there was much air punching and virtue signalling. Yet given the marginalisation of the Church in the modern world, other issues are more important than feminism, like preaching Christ faithfully to the nations. Feminists lament the absence of a theology of female ordination, which is true, yet there is no theology of male ordination either. There are only historical traditions evolved from observed biological facts, like the differences between men and women and how this influences their complementary roles.

Outside the Church, social justice rhetoric stresses intersectionality: the ways in which interlocking systems of power oppress individuals by class, race, sexual orientation, age, creed, disability and gender. Of course, the Bible contains a great deal of social justice rhetoric too, but there is an unbridgeable gulf between what believers and feminists mean by social justice. For believers, they are what flows from “believing loyalty” to biblical precepts. For feminists, they are confected debates about inequality. When these two forms of rhetoric conflict, one side appeals to responsibilities, the other side appeals to rights (which are looking increasingly like a menu of choices, a shopping list).

A great majority of Australia’s twenty-three Anglican dioceses now ordain women to the priesthood. The others still ordain women to the diaconate, an important ministry in itself. So, have the causes of justice, equality, freedom and empowerment been served? In theory, Yes, as there is ample

opportunity for female vocations to be fulfilled. Any woman with a vocation can present herself to a diocese that ordains women to the priesthood, and she can still be ordained to the diaconate in those dioceses that do not. In practice, No, as feminist rhetoric demands those recalcitrant dioceses be brought into line, so they can be included on the menu of choices, the shopping list.

Attaching women’s ordination to feminist rhetoric is small-minded and mean-spirited. The overwhelming majority of women are not feminists and feminism has long since become ideologically bankrupt and sociologically dangerous. The rhetoric about women not being men, and men being the source of all evil—from colonialism, to climate change, to child abuse—goes nowhere, offers no solutions, and tells us nothing about the now forbidden subject of female complementarity.

Over the years, there have been many arguments in favour of women’s ordination. Early on in the movement, much was said about positive female attributes: nurturing, intuitiveness, peace-making, consensus-building, collective decision-making, emotional intelligence. It was once hoped women would bring these hypothetical attributes to the priesthood, allowing them to model the feminine aspect of God. Where has this rhetoric gone? Why has it disappeared? Has it become untrue, suddenly, or just politically incorrect? The disappearance is easily explained. Feminists now insist these non-male attributes, once attributed to the female realm, are intrinsic to male constructions of female identity, hence to patriarchy, and therefore must be banned.

Feminist hermeneutics—feminist interpretations of scripture—has two broad agendas: first, to critique the male biases of Christian theology; second, to discover or unearth an alternative historical tradition that supports the full personhood of woman, whatever *personhood* means, and her inclusion in leadership roles in the Church, including headship. The intention here is not to complement the male tradition but to replace it with new norms for interpreting what is true or false about it. Most feminist theologians are suspicious about the usefulness of traditional feminine concepts—such as Wisdom, Mariology and Mother Church—even when they are affirming, because they are now understood to be the shadow side of male domination.

All feminist evaluations of scripture proceed from three principal moves: First, *deconstruction*, or reading what runs counter to the intended meaning and structural unity of a text. Second, *retrieval*, or discovering what the text may have suppressed or erased (reclaiming what Foucault calls “subjugated knowledges”). Third, *reconstruction*, or reconstituting

the text to make it acceptable to feminists.

The struggle between progressives and conservatives is real, wherever it occurs in the Anglosphere. This is the real backstory. Confected anxieties about churchmanship are smokescreens for a High and Broad Church fear of losing control of the agenda. Up to this point, progressives have focused on bowing to the zeitgeist, chasing after secularism, and thumbing their noses at Sydney Evangelicals. The problem with this is now obvious. Even if the Church says yes to the progressives' every demand, not one person will turn to Christ. On the contrary, many will turn away and tune out. The data about this paint a grim story. Liberal Protestant denominations are shrinking. Bible-based Churches are growing.

Paul makes a critical point in Galatians 3:28 which the Church has always accepted as true: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Most women in the Church know this, except disgruntled feminists. Women's ordination adds nothing to this truth and, ironically, takes something away from it.

Unlike women's ordination, which did not cause a schism, ordaining practising homosexuals and blessing same-sex unions is another story. There is an important principle here, Chesterton's fence, which urges caution when making changes to systems not fully understood. If there are fences preventing a population from adapting to a hyper-novelty—like ignoring the distinctions between sex and gender, heterosexuality and homosexuality, or biological men and biological women—the fences should not be removed until their function is understood. The crisis in Anglicanism is caused by the removal of too many Chesterton fences.

According to evolutionary biology, lesbians and gay men are both attracted to individuals of the same sex, yet the differences between them, in terms of their evolutionary origins and how their relationships tend to play out, are both large and consistent in evolutionary terms. Female homosexuality cannot be separated from female evolution (being a woman, having a female sexuality). Male homosexuality cannot be separated from male evolution (being a man, having a male sexuality). Nevertheless, heterosexuality remains the norm, from an evolutionary perspective, and heterosexual monogamy is still the

best mating system.

This perspective is self-evidently true—to those who agree with it—but it is now regarded as lies by those in control. Now that gender ideology is hegemonic, protected by public policy, enforced by legislation, aided-and-abetted by the media (and progressive Christians), one cannot voice what was until recently an accepted fact about human sexuality—biblical or evolutionary—without being accused of hate speech.

If the motive for affirming same-sex marriage is to promote "an enrichment of the Christian understanding of marriage and a witness to God's grace and love"—by pretending same-sex partnerships and heterosexual marriage are (or should be) interchangeable—then Anglicans are seriously deluded about what male homosexuality means in evolutionary terms. Gay men did not evolve to be monogamous. Expecting or wanting them to be monogamous is impossible and unreasonable.

More to the point, it is extremely unlikely same-sex marriage would have achieved public acceptance—outside the Church—without cures and treatments for the consequences of male-to-male sex. Gay men have different personas for different contexts, one for the straight world, one for the gay-friendly world, and one for the gay world itself (where gay men do what gay men do when alone). It is not enough to frame the

same-sex marriage debate simply as gay Christians wanting their love acknowledged.

Celibacy is the answer, because the problem is not homosexuality itself—God does not despise what he made—but practising it. For those into clichés, corny but true, this is called loving the sinner not the sin. It is difficult to have a meaningful discussion about celibacy, however, because we are so habituated to the sexual revolution that we no longer think about sexual continence in biblical terms. Human freedoms and rights are now tenaciously attached to permissive sexual activity, construed as freedom and right. In this permissive context, discussions about celibacy can only be framed in limited or negative terms.

In Australia, the Anglican Church treats gay people well, even in conservative dioceses. If the only thing conservative Anglicans expect from homosexuals is their celibacy, things are not as bad as we are led to believe. The myth that conservatism harms personal freedom is mischief disseminated for ideological and political purposes. At some point, High

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and Broad Church Anglicans must acknowledge their Fundamental Declarations without using the Diocese of Sydney as a scapegoat for their identity formation.

In the modern world, what remains of sexual morality is downstream from science. Apart from cures and treatments for sexually transmitted infections, same-sex partnerships are only now being thought of as nuclear families—in the traditional or heterosexual sense—because of advances in technology. This is particularly so with reproductive technology, which allows human reproduction by artificial means. While human fertilisation still depends on an egg (a female gamete) and a sperm (a male gamete), female couples can now have children without males, and male couples can now have children without females. This is where things fall apart, morally.

Are there moral issues about male or female gametes, the only two cells able to unite and create human life? Are there moral issues about how female couples obtain sperm and how male couples obtain eggs? Are there moral issues about whether the sperm donor has the right to be identified as the biological father, as he has in some jurisdictions? Are there moral issues around surrogacy, or are wombs to be rented like holiday flats?

When the Anglosphere allowed same-sex couples the right to marry, and have children, it did so without consensus or serious debate about the moral consequences. A conservative US pastor, Douglas Wilson, asks a pertinent question about this: “What are you embracing for the sake of what you are avoiding?” As Anglicans seek to understand the new definitions of sex, gender, equality, freedom and diversity being imposed upon the Church, it is necessary to consider whose interests they serve, not what the supporters of the new definitions believe. Who is behind these hyper-novelties? Why are they being pushed?

Most Australian Christians are aware of tensions within the Anglican Church. Internationally, GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) was established after the Episcopal Church in the US consecrated as bishop, in 2003, a practising homosexual in a same-sex partnership. (The couple divorced in 2014.) The consecration was a clear breach of Resolution 1.10, passed by an overwhelming majority at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which determined:

- the God-given context for sex is a marriage between a man and a woman,
- abstinence should be honoured outside marriage,

- homosexuals should be treated with pastoral sensitivity, and homophobia should be denounced wherever it occurs.

Nationally, a new Diocese of the Southern Cross was recently established under the retired Archbishop of Sydney, Glenn Davies, in response to the May 2022 failure of General Synod to pass the motion affirming marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

So, Anglicans find themselves caught up in the culture wars, willingly or unwillingly. The stakes are high and cannot be trivialised. The hyper-novelty of ordaining practising homosexuals and sanctioning same-sex marriages is tearing the Church apart.

Ultimately, for Christians, the issue is whether this hyper-novelty can be reconciled with the Christian worldview—its anthropology of being human in relation to God—and be absorbed into the Church’s theology. The parallel records of biblical revelation and human evolution must be considered more than they have been. The tendency to gloss over the tensions by invoking a non-judgmental God of Love is wholly inadequate. Jesus does not condemn the woman caught in adultery but he does make a judgment when he tells her to go and sin no more (John 8:1–11).

There is an unfortunate tendency to second-guess Jesus and put words in his mouth. He told many parables about God’s kingdom—what it is like—all of which embody a reversal of expectations at the heart of the Gospel. If Christians have always been tempted to see their faith through the lens of the world—its politics, philosophies and aesthetics—it is worth recalling Dean Inge’s famous warning: “Whoever marries the spirit of the age will find himself a widow in the next.”

Most of the conflicts of churchmanship in Australian Anglicanism are born of hubris, the belief that Anglicans can legislate to make the Gospel mean what they want it to mean, rather than what the biblical record says, and the evolutionary record too. Anglican identity constructed around churchmanship is fatally flawed. If High and Broad Church Anglicans confuse their churchmanship with their faith—and experience Sydney Evangelicalism as an existential threat—the time has come to reconsider their perceptions. A great deal is at stake. Resolution 1.10 carries enormous moral weight and cannot be gainsaid.

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