

COM120 - ASSESSMENT THREE

ESSAY

MARRIAGE EQUALITY AND THE UNITING CHURCH

0459 771 520 COMRADE SHELLY DAHL-11549030

Introduction

This essay will address why the Uniting Church Australia (UCA) needs to hold a public position on marriage equality. Written from a liberation theology perspective, this essay will address the following issues. Firstly, the UCA's current position on marriage equality. Secondly, CRAVE MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) liberation theology church views in support of marriage equality. Thirdly, why is there a need to separate the church and the state in legalising marriage equality in Australia. Fourthly, why marriage equality is an equal civil human right and not an issue of morals? Fifthly, marriage equality and the bible. Finally, inequality in the church; why do the majority of Christians support the campaign for marriage equality in Australia. This essay will be presented in the context of the campaign for equality, justice and reconciliation in the church in the struggle towards heaven on earth.

Body

Currently the UCA has a mixed position on the issue of marriage equality that is slowly changing towards affirming united support for marriage equality. *United Justice, Unity and Friends* as well *Paddington Uniting Church* affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, queer, sex and gender diverse (LGBTIQSDG) people are:

“Neither sick, nor sinful. That it should welcome LGBTIQSDG relationships into its churches and allow them to fully participate in every way that heterosexual people can (Hand, 2013).”

The *Thirteenth Assembly of the UCA* in July 2012 passed a two part resolution on the issue of marriage (Bos, October 2013). The first part reaffirmed an outdated 1997 eighth Assembly of the UCA position of marriage is between a man and a woman (Bos, October 2013). The second part affirmed support for further discussion within the UCA on the issue of marriage through a consultation report to be presented by the fourteenth assembly of UCA in 2015 (Bos, October 2013). While it is not clear how many were consulted with in the UCA, Dr Reverend Robert Bos concluded:

“Clearly, there is no agreed theology of marriage in the Uniting Church. The responses to the consultation process reported a wide range of views. At the same time, many demonstrated openness to change and reviewing their position. 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 (October 2013).”

There are seven theological church views of marriage equality ranging from hatred, resistance, persuasion, discipleship, compromise, affirmation and liberation. *Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)*, *Crave MCC* and *New Covenant* have a liberation view in support on Marriage Equality. MCC has a long proud history of campaigning for marriage equality as part of our gospel. According to liberation theologian Pastor Comrade Karl Hand:

“The oppression of LGBTIQSDG people is the real sin, and full inclusion in the church (including Marriage Equality) is part of our gospel. We should advocate for their rights in the church to make sure they are fully included and that their voices are heard at every level (2013).”

In 2004 the Australian Government broke *Section 116* of the *Commonwealth Constitution Act of Australia* and used the bible to ban LGBTIQSDG marriage equality in Australia. The Howard government along with the ALP misquoted the bible to argue marriage is between a man and a woman to justify banning LGBTIQSDG marriage equality with no separation of the church and the state on the issue. Section 116 of the Commonwealth Institution Act states:

“Commonwealth not to legislate in respect of religion - The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth (AustLII, 2014)”.

Therefore, the Commonwealth doesn't give any Australian Government the God given right to use the bible to ban marriage equality in any church in the Commonwealth of Australia.

The case for marriage equality is an equal civil human right and not an issue of morals or a new issue. According to *How the marriage ban is used to oppress*:

“There is a history which explains how we ended up in this situation. In fact, throughout Australia’s history, marriage has been used as a marker of privilege, a special right, which is only given to certain groups, while others have been denied equal marriage rights (Hand, 2011, p. 12).”

Poverty was first used by the government of the British colony of Australia to ban convict marriage rights in 1788. Convicts had to prove they were working class citizens to the government to be granted the same equal marriage rights as those from wealthy, privileged backgrounds. Convict marriage rights was only won in 1852-53 when the Australian Anti-Transportation League took up the cause of marriage equality in their fight to abolish convict transportation (Hand, 2011, pp. 12-13).

In 1901 the Australian government introduced the white Australia policy. This included Government bans on Aboriginal citizenship rights and Government bans on Aboriginal marriage rights of both interracial marriages and marriages between Aboriginals of the same race. Ministers in rural missions were the ones who defended Aboriginal marriage rights as, “all races are equal before God” (Hand, 2011, pp. 13-14).

According to Karl Hand:

“...In 1967, a national referendum resulted in an overwhelming 97% majority granting full citizenship and suffrage to indigenous people. Just as in the case for the emancipation of the convict, the emancipation of indigenous people came after a vanguard movement for marriage equality! ...Finally, (history) makes it clear that marriage rights are not an optional extra, but are part and parcel of human rights...without discrimination based on their sex, sexuality or gender (2011, pp. 13-14).”

The Bible has a long history of being used as a weapon to ban, deny, hate, blame, dole out guilt, oppress, exploit, condemn, silence, treat illegal and exclude the equality of God’s LGBTIQSDG children.

According to *The Bible and Homosexuality*:

“It is important to remember that such hurtful things are not a reflection of Christ, or the way God wants the church to be, or even what the Bible really says (West, 2014).”

Genesis 1:27 is about God's creation of humanity in God's own image that is inclusive of all sexualities and genders. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (NRSV)." "This also applies to intersex people, who have been created with physical characteristics of both sexes (Tightrope, 2013)."

In Genesis 2:18 God declares what is "not good" for humanity is to be alone who actually supports marriage equality inclusive of all sexualities and genders. Genesis 2:18 states, "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that humanity should be alone; I will make humanity a helper as its partner (NRSV).'" God declares from the beginning marriage is a partnership of humanity and its helper based on mutuality and love regardless of sexuality or gender as God had created a type of primitive communism. According to systematic theology lecturer Ben Myers Adam and Eve is defined as humanity and its helper (22 April 2014). While the origins of the oppression of LGBTIQSDG people in the family is acknowledged in Genesis 2:22-25, God did not uphold heterosexual relationships as the only ideal within the family.

Sodom and Gomorrah is not about condemning LGBTIQSDG people. According to MCC Elder Dr Rev Mona West the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is:

"In essence they want to rape them in order to show their social and cultural dominance over them...In, Ezekiel 16:49, Luke 17:28-29 and Jude 1:7 Sodom's 'sin' is not identified as homosexuality, rather, their sins were pride, failure to help the poor, and lack of hospitality to foreigners (2014)."

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is referring to the lying's of all sexuality and genders in relation to domineering abusive anal penetration and not about prohibiting marriage equality. According to *Leviticus for Lovers 3: Lying's of a woman*:

"Olyan concludes that 'the lying down of a man' means being penetrated, and 'the lying down of a female' means penetration, and that what is being forbidden here is male anal penetration – not homoerotic behaviour in general (Hand, 2013)."

Romans 1:18-3:20 was written to help resolve cultural conflict with God's generous inclusivity with the sin being Idolatry of the Roman Imperial Cult and not about prohibiting marriage equality. According to *Walk the Tightrope*:

“For Paul, ‘natural’ always means socially acceptable; ‘shameful’ refers to public humiliation...His conclusion speaks to any cultural conflict: all are equally sinful and equally redeemable (2013).”

The writings of Apostle Paul of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11 speaks of pederasty, prohibiting dominance, submission, unequal status and abusive relationships in all sexual partnerships. Paul did not speak of prohibiting marriage equality. According to MCC Elder Mona West:

“The Mediterranean world had a definition of sexuality that was based on dominance/submission and unequal status...These abusive relationships are what the apostle Paul is referencing, not mutually loving and caring relationships between people of the same sex (2014).”

The majority of Christians support the campaign marriage equality that MCC has a long history of supporting globally because there is a long history of inequality in the church. “A galaxy research poll recorded 53% of Christians and Sixty-seven percent of non-Christians support marriage equality in Australia, while 41% of Christians oppose it (AME, 2011). According to *Churches Still Free To Discriminate* the key reason why the majority of Christians support the campaign for marriage equality is:

“Lurking behind Australia's marriage ban is an even more sinister injustice clothed in the language of religious tolerance. Religious organisations have a blanket exemption from the anti-discrimination act, which means no matter how many rights LGBTIQ people win, religious organisations are not legally bound to honour them. There are several implications of this exemption, each of which is a significant example of the oppression of LGBTIQ people...If we win marriage equality it will not be the end of the struggle...That's why we can't give up this fight (Hand, 2011, pp. 9-11).”

Conclusion

The struggle for marriage equality is an important part of the struggle for justice, equality and reconciliation in the church for Christian LGBTIQSDG people. For the Uniting Church to be a ministry of reconciliation for the Christian LGBTIQSDG community then it needs a clear united public position in support of marriage equality. The Uniting Church having a united public position in support of marriage equality will go a long way for justice, equality and reconciliation for the Christian LGBTIQSDG community in the struggle towards heaven on earth.

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