

Marriage, Sex and Gender

Susan Gilchrist

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1:0: Introduction

Marriage, Sex and Gender, and the relationships between them have long caused major problems in society. The doctrines promulgated by many religions can create enormous guilt. This article considers the experiences which are encountered in marriages when a transgender individual is involved. Every person in such a relationship has a personal story, strong emotions are often involved and it is necessary to define the boundaries at the start of any discussion whenever that may take place. The following topics are considered in this article:

Transgender Issues and Perspectives
Pastoral Matters
Relationships and Marriage Survival Rates
Church of England Background
Limits of Scientific Input
Social Change and Social Expectations
Refusal and Resistance
Embargos
Denial and Misunderstanding
Theological Research
Summary and Conclusions

This document is associated with a presentation given at a weekend meeting of the Sibyls, a Christian Spirituality Group for Transgender people³. The presentation slides are available at:

¹ Personal Biography <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

² This article is available on: Gilchrist, Susan. (2017): " *Marriage, Sex and Gender*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/030B-MarriageAndGenderArticle.pdf>

³ Details of the Sibyls are available on the website www.sibyls.co.uk , and on the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/sibylsgroup/>

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1

Gilchrist, Susan. (2017): "One Church, One Faith, One Lord: Marriage, Sex and Gender" Sibyls Hilfield Weekend 22-24 September 2017 <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SuH0922a-MarriageAndGenderSlides.pdf>.⁴ Details of the Sibyls are available on the website www.sibyls.co.uk and on the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/sibylsgroup/> . It also draws on the following paper: Gilchrist, Susan and Beardsley, Tina. (2014): A Presentation for The Workshop: "Love's constancy & legal niceties: transgender perspectives on marriage". Led by Tina Beardsley & Susan Gilchrist⁵, "To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage", held on Saturday 27th September 2014 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. at St John's Church, Waterloo, London. For the paper see: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SuE0927f-TrangenderMarriageFinal.pdf>

2:0: Transgender Issues and Perspectives

Many transgender people are already familiar with the difficulties that can be encountered in marriages where a transgender partner is involved. How manage can or may survive when one of the partners transitions is a crucial concern and the adjustments which are demanded of spouses are at least as great if not greater than those on the transgender partner

That challenge is greater because gender identity and sexual orientation act independently of each other. Many transgender people marry in their imposed gender role, and do so for all the right reasons and love they possess. However as age increases the drive gets stronger and if no way is found to manage these dynamics the outcome can be a total, sudden and catastrophic collapse. This can have devastating results. When gender and sexuality are in conflict, sexuality is usually suppressed. There is the destruction of relationships and commitments through the failure to cope, even when love is as strong as ever. There is the blame for letting oneself down, the hurt to other people that has been caused and the guilt for the inability to conform to the edicts of others and one's own expectations. Christian doctrines contradict the results of the great majority of current scientific investigations and also the results of this author's research. As a consequence medical misdiagnoses are made

This research, and the worldwide scientific consensus shows that gender and sexually variant conditions arise from the search for identity, not desire. Thus the entire range of moral attitudes and behaviours are to be found amongst gender and sexually variant people as in the community at large. Gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities according to the highest standards of their societies should be highly valued. Those engaged in misuse should be strongly condemned. Traditional Christian doctrines do not recognise this duality. All forms of gender and sexually variant expression are condemned as a falling from Grace, which are driven by desires for inappropriate or illegitimate sex.

Enormous harm can occur as a consequence of these misdiagnoses and the guilt that is created by the doctrine itself. The techniques required to manage identity driven conditions are almost opposite to those required for reward driven ones⁶ For transgender people much of one's self identity is built on a foundation that society either refuses to recognise or does not expect. Crippling harm can be

⁴ Gilchrist, Susan. (2017): "One Church, One Faith, One Lord: Marriage, Sex and Gender" Sibyls Hilfield Weekend 22-24 September 2017 <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SuH0922a-MarriageAndGenderSlides.pdf>.

⁵ Gilchrist, Susan and Beardsley, Tina: (2014): A Presentation for The Workshop: Love's constancy & legal niceties: transgender perspectives on marriage Led by Tina Beardsley & Susan Gilchrist' To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage', held on Saturday 27th September 2014 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. at St John's Church, Waterloo, London. <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SuE0925b-TrangenderMarriageSlides.pdf> . For the accompanying paper see: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SuE0927f-TrangenderMarriageFinal.pdf>

⁶ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf>

created by the attitudes of some religious groups who heap guilt on people who cannot follow the path they prescribe. The trauma this creates can be enormous and further attempts to fight the conflict only accelerate the demand. It is imperative that the correct management methods are applied⁷

3:0 Pastoral Matters

In association with other LGBTI groups, members of the Sibyls have been campaigning for the full acceptance of gender and sexually variant people in the Christian Church. In order to work through the traumas at a personal level, confidentiality will always be required. The Sibyls continues its ongoing work with couples. Professionally facilitated support is being enabled. A Community House is available, through the Sibyls, where couples can meet with others in small groups, to give mutual support, and to deal with issues that arise.

4:0 Relationships and Marriage Survival Rates

4:1 Female to Male Transgender Relationships and Survival Rates

One descriptive study⁸ examined the prevalence of romantic relationships in a large-scale international sample of female-to-male (FTM) transgender men, the rates that partners stay together during the gender transition of one of the partners, and the interconnections between the perceived social support from romantic relationships and the mental health of FTMs. Of those who were in a relationship before they decided to transition, about half reported that their relationship had been maintained. Of the relationships which did not survive after the transition, about half of FTMs reported the reason for separation was related to their transition.

4:2 Male to Female Transgender Relationships and Survival Rates

Similar experiences are found with male to female transsexuals. Virginia Erhardt, gives an important insight into the experiences of wives coping with their MTF partners' gender transition⁹. Of the genetic males¹⁰ who enter treatment, approximately 50% are either married or they have been married, and about 70% have children. Erhardt describes the wide range of experiences encountered. The book is also analysed in a paper by Bischof, Warnaar, Barajas, and Dhaliwal¹¹. Although these data have not been quantified a similar survival rate to that of female to males might be expected

⁷ Gilchrist, S. (2013): "Management Techniques for Gender Dysphoria with Particular Reference to Transsexuality": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/205P-ManagementTechniquesInGenderDysphoria.pdf>

⁸ Meier, S. Colton; Sharp, Carla; Michonski, Jared; Babcock, Julia C; Fitzgerald, Kara: (2013) "Romantic Relationships of Female-to-Male Transgender Men: A Descriptive Study" International Journal of Transgenderism, 14:75–85, 2013: Taylor & Francis Group: ISSN: 1553-2739 print / 1434-4599 online
DOI: 10.1080/15532739.2013.791651

⁹ Erhardt, V. (2007): "Head over heels: Wives who stay with cross-dressers and transsexuals". New York: Haworth Press.

¹⁰ This identification is used in the research work which is being quoted: using it does not define the gender identity: its use excludes intersex conditions where genetic differences occur.

¹¹ Bischof, Gary H. Warnaar, Bethany L. Barajas, Mark S. Dhaliwal, Harkiran K (2011): "Thematic Analysis of the Experiences of Wives Who Stay with Husbands who Transition Male-to-Female". Western Michigan University: *Michigan Family Review*, 15(1), 16-34, 2011 © Michigan Council on Family Relations

4:3: Sexual Orientation

In an Internet study of more than 1,000 FTMs the results indicated that transgender men may participate in a variety of sexual behaviours with all types of partners¹². In addition, the sexual attractions of about one third of FTMs shift while they are transitioning, usually from attractions to men only, or women only, or to a more bisexual or queer orientation. Circumstantial evidence and Erhardt's study suggests that an equivalent rate amongst MTF transsexuals might be expected. A further secular resource which is available is "*The Transgender Partner Handbook*" by Jo Green¹³

4:4: Legitimacy

These findings highlight the fact that many relationships can and do endure through a gender transition, and they emphasise the importance of close, supportive relationships during and after transition. The results of these studies demonstrate that from this scientific research, and from practical experience, the love and commitment which can be found in a marriage is not determined by gender identity or by sexual orientation.

The rates at which gender and sexually variant people are murdered are much higher than those of the general population, and the rates of suicide, or attempted suicide, by transgender people are extremely high. More than four in five transgender young people have self-harmed. Also more than two in five transgender young people have attempted to take their own life¹⁴

5:0: Contradictions and Consequences

A major conflict occurs because the traditional teaching of the Christian Church on gender and sexual variation contradicts the results of these investigations, the scientific consensus, and routine experience, all of which show that the love and commitment in a marriage is not defined by gender identity or sexual orientation.

The subverting of the boundaries suggests that the same degree of acceptance must be applied to all marriages, heterosexual, same-sex and transgender alike¹⁵. Lives are at risk when these issues are not addressed.

6:0 Church of England Background

In addition to the science based neurophysiological and psychological analysis, this author has carried out an extended theological examination using the results of the scientific analysis to determine how and why the contradiction between science and theology occurs. It is shown that it is not the principles of science which need to be re-examined. It is changes in the theology of the Church.

¹² Meier, S. C., Green, J., & Dickey, I., (2010, November). "Sexual behaviors, health, and satisfaction of transgender men (FTMs) with and without hormonal and surgical modifications: Preliminary results". In T. Lostutter (Chair), *Sexual health and functioning: Using data to inform cognitive behavioral treatments*. Symposium presented at the annual conference of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, San Francisco, CA. As cited in 8

¹³ Green, Jo. (2017): "*The Transgender Partner Handbook: A Guide to When Your Partner Transitions*": Jessica Kingsley, ISBN 978 1 78592 227 5 eISBN 978 1 78450 503 5

¹⁴ Stonewall/Cambridge University (2017): "*School Report (2017)*" <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017>

¹⁵ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf>

The Pilling Report published in November 2013 provided an initial road map for Shared or Facilitated Conversations and for the further actions that have since been taken. There was criticism of the use and application of scientific evidence. This was highlighted by Dr Chris Cook in the Church Times of the 19th September 2014.

7:0 Limits of Scientific Input

The points that Chris Cook made in 2014, in relation to the consideration of science in the Pilling Report, were as follows:

- Insufficient rigour
- Careful biblical exegesis needs to be accompanied by an equally careful analysis and interpretation of the scientific evidence
- The report fails to distinguish carefully between sexual orientation, sexual identity, sexual attraction, and sexual behaviour.
- This failure to ask appropriate, difficult questions makes it difficult to develop a coherent Christian view of sexuality which has both scientific and theological integrity.
- Science, as a strand of reason, seems to contribute little or nothing to the conclusions reached in the report.
- These issues fundamentally affect and influence people's personal relationships, and our understanding of the interactions between love and sex in heterosexual, same-sex, and transgender partnerships, including the sanctification of marriage.

8:0: Social Change and Social Expectations

For so long as the Church held temporal power over the structures of society, its theology could not effectively be questioned. That is no longer the case in the present day Church. There is still the refusal to consider the current scientific consensus. By condemning all forms of gender and sexually variant behaviour as a falling from Grace, the legitimacy of love in transgender and same-sex relationships is weakened or destroyed. As far as the author can ascertain, there was no consideration of science at all during the whole of the "Shared Conversations" process, which ran from 2014 to 2016¹⁶. Nor is there any consideration of science in the subsequent 2017 *Bishop's Reflection Group on Sexuality* report^{17 18}.

¹⁶ Shared Conversations: See: Church of England (2015) Shared Conversations Website: [Online]. [Accessed 15/10/2015]: <http://www.sharedconversations.org/>

¹⁷ Church of England (2017): "Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations. A Report from the House of Bishops": General Synod Document 2055 <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3863472/gs-2055-marriage-and-same-sex-relationships-after-the-shared-conversations-report-from-the-house-of-bishops.pdf>: See also: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/229P-GS2055.pdf>

¹⁸ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "What Next? Some thoughts following the rejection by the General Synod of the Church of England, of report issued by the "Bishop's Reflection Group on Sexuality"". <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/229P-WhatNext.pdf>

9:0: Refusal and Resistance

Despite all of these concerns there is little evidence that the Churches are willing to move sufficiently on these matters. The 2017 report of the Church England "*Bishop's Reflection Group on Sexuality*" confined any future consideration to that of: "*Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church*".

On the 16th February 2017 following the decision by the General Synod not to take note of the report of the Bishops Reflection Group the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote a letter to members of the Church of England which restated the same position. In the paper: "*Next Steps on Human Sexuality*" also written by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, which was approved by the General of the Church of England on the 7th July 2017, the same constraints were applied. This has the implication that they will continue to be applied to all future work. Pope Francis has repeatedly stated that there can be no possibility of change or correction to the traditionally accepted teaching of the Catholic Church¹⁹

10:0: Embargos

It seems that all of these consultations have been wrapped up in the bubbles of their own theologies, without any consideration being given either to science or to what is happening in society at large. The embargo of: "*Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church*" destroys any opportunity of testing, discussing or confronting the key issues that need to be addressed. Like the man who built his house on sand, the whole foundation could be destroyed. This refusal to engage is creating great damage not just in sexual and gender matters but to Christianity itself²⁰.

11:0: Denial and Misunderstanding

Uncertainty is excusable but the failure to deal with the known issues cannot be excused. The argument that "*More work needs to be done*" does not hold water in the face of the amount of work that already exists²¹. There is the need to step back and to take a new scientific approach. That has been a major focus of my studies²². This approach is formulated in the context of a new neurophysiological and psychological investigation into the development of personality and self-identity in infancy and early childhood²³.

¹⁹ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice". <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>

²⁰ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>

²¹ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Gender and Sexual Malpractice and Abuse in the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/236P-Malpractice.pdf>

²² <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/bibliography.htm>

²³ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-InfluencesPersonality.pdf>

12:0: Theological Research

It is shown that the traditional teaching of the Christian Church on gender and sexuality does not correspond with the findings on human development indicated by the scientific research. By removing the theological presumptions on gender and sexuality, which dominated both Church and society for the last two thousand years, new insights into biblical texts are possible. It is shown that the teaching of Jesus on gender equality and gender and sexual variance would support the present day insights, and that all transgender, transsexual lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual people who attempt to live their lives in ways that fulfil the love of Christ, and who seek to express their own identities in roles that are true to themselves; must all be accepted in the Christian Church.

It is demonstrated that the adaptations of the teaching of Jesus and the creation of doctrines which were more representative of those belonging to a gender polarised and a male dominated Greco/Roman society came from the requirement to give respectability to the Church^{24 25}. It is established that a paradigm shift has taken place in the Christian tradition where the first century condemnations of same-sex intercourse which had been based on the abuses of power, purpose and hospitality in society have been turned into the unchangeable condemnation of the sexual act. It is demonstrated that this has led to the enforcement of a strong heterosexual, gender defined and an exclusive orthodoxy within which every expression of gender and sexually variant behaviour is considered to be a mortal sin and a disordered act²⁶.

In present day society people can see for themselves the moral duality that is inherent to gender and sexually variant behaviour, and the love and lifetime commitments which are expressed in same sex-relationships. The refusal to consider even the possibility of any change or correction to the traditional doctrines of the Church, or to recognise the realities of science, or the lived experiences of gender and sexually variant people is today destroying the credibility of Christianity and the Church.

13:0 Summary and Conclusions

- The research confirms that as large a range of moral attitudes principles and behaviour will be found amongst the gender and sexually variant communities as that which is encountered in society at large.
- It shows that gender identity and sexual orientation often do not coincide. As extended a range of sexual interests and orientations is also to be expected among transgender people as there is in society at large.
- It validates those activities that are engaged in for the pursuit of love and it distinguishes them from those engaged in for the misuse of sex
- Thus the entire range of moral attitudes and behaviours are to be found amongst gender and sexually variant people as in the community at large. Gender and sexually variant people

²⁴ Gilchrist, S. (2015): "Deuteronomy 22:5 and its Impact on Gender and Sexual Variation in the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/022B-Deuteronomy22-5.pdf>

²⁵ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "The Gospel of Thomas and its Impact on Gender and Sexual Variation in the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/027B-Thomas.pdf>

²⁶ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf> Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf>

who express their true attractions and identities according to the highest standards of their societies should be highly valued. Those engaged in misuse should be strongly condemned.

- Traditional Christian doctrines do not recognise this duality. All forms of gender and sexually variant expression are condemned as a falling from Grace, which are driven by desires for inappropriate or illegitimate sex.
- This author's research confirms and validates the worldwide scientific consensus which agrees that gender and sexually variant conditions arise from the search for identity, not desire
- The techniques required to manage identity driven conditions are almost opposite to those required for reward driven ones. Enormous harm can occur as a consequence of these misdiagnoses and the guilt that is created by the Christian doctrine itself.
- All of these have major impacts on marriage and romantic relationships when a transgender partner is involved.

13:1: How does all of this tie up with Christian Doctrines on Marriage?

- Much of the current campaigning focus on LGBTI issues is concerned with issues concerning the acceptability of same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage in Christianity and the Christian Church.
- For transgender people the issues are different since those who have obtained legal recognition of their gender identity through the granting of a United Kingdom Gender Recognition Certificate are already able to have a full Church of England wedding, which can also take place in a Church of England Church.
- The traditional doctrine of the Christian Church is that marriage can only be between a man and a woman for life.
- That doctrine is challenged when one person in a heterosexual marriage undergoes gender reassignment.
- These findings highlight the fact that many relationships can and do endure through a gender transition, and they emphasise the importance of close, supportive relationships during and after transition.
- It is demonstrated from this scientific research, and from practical experience, that the love and commitment which can be found in a marriage is not determined by gender identity or by sexual orientation.
- Therefore gender transition, together with the associated changes in sexual orientation, (whenever they occur), confound the principles on which the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage and on gender and sexual variant behaviour, is based
- Although the issues for transgender and LGB people are different, both groups are fellow travellers in relationships with society

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- It is important for the Sibyls to continue to have input to the development of the teaching document on sexuality which is being prepared by the Church of England
- However it must also remain free to challenge the results

14:0: Papers for further consideration:

- Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*Condemning Sexual Abuse and Welcoming Gender and Sexually Variant People into the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/237P-ChangesInChurch.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice*". <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf>
- Other selected papers: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/000B-SG-SelectedPapers.pdf>
- A full bibliography is available at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/bibliography.htm>

15:0: Some Scenarios for Discussion

15:1 Circumstances

- A couple married for 37 years where one partner is a transgender woman and lives in dual roles with her family's support. She does not have gender recognition.
- A couple married for 8 years following the gender recognition of one of the partners, but who have been a couple for 42 years.
- A couple married in the Roman Catholic Church 25-30 years ago, one partner transitioned in 2001 but did not obtain gender recognition when this became available because they did not wish to dissolve the marriage and enter into a civil partnership which was the option until the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.

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Draft: Printed: 07/11/2017 10:50

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- An elderly married couple, one of whom had had transitioned many years previously, and who did avail themselves of gender recognition – by fast track – when this became available followed by a civil partnership ceremony. Particular care was given to protecting the spouses pension rights although she has predeceased her partner.
- A married couple, one of whom lived in dual role with her spouse's support, and then transitioned after the death of her spouse and who is still single.
- A married couple, who separated and then divorced when one of them transitioned - in some scenarios the spouse supports the transitioning partner until the point when that becomes full time.
- A married couple, where one partner cross-dresses periodically and socially to express a part of their identity, but has no intention of transitioning. If this is a male they usually have a strong male gender identity.
- Someone who was twice married and divorced and attracted to females and who then transitions and is attracted to males.
- A married person transitions and the couple stay together but the partner who has transitioned now finds themselves attracted to someone of the opposite gender to themselves and their spouse.
- A female couple, one of whom has a transgender history and also identifies as intersex and who presents butch, and who are able to marry under the legislature of their state.

15:2: Some Questions, Implications & Considerations

- What are the legal issues in a marriage where the transgender spouse is not the biological parent but wishes to be registered as such?
- What are the impacts of transition on the marriage of those whose children, or some of them, are unsupportive to the transgender parent?
- What is your view on the statistics of couples who stay together or separate?
- What are the reasons why couples separate at this point?
- How essential is gender to marriage? What is your view on children who identify as transgender?
- How should we define heterosexuality and homosexuality – absolutely/seeking the complement/seeking the similar or what?

15:3: Theology

- Official teaching states that marriage is only 'Between a man and a woman for life.'

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10

- Transgender and intersex people pose a significant challenge to that assertion.
- Is marriage limited to a man and a woman? Dare we ask what defines a man and what defines a woman?
- Are we agreed that Christian marriage, or the ideal of it, is life-long fidelity?
- What is the role of procreation in marriage?
- What do you understand by gender complementarity and is this essential to a marriage?
- Is marriage a sacrament: is the marriage ceremony a sacrament? Who makes it a sacrament? Can transgender people's marriages reflect the union of Christ and the Church?

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11