

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

Church of Ireland Marriage Council – Seconded by Dr Joan Turner

I am the last dinosaur from the former Marriage Committee and now my term on the present Marriage Council is over, and in the past 12 years those committees have seen considerable changes in the issues we have had to face. They have both been most interesting and stimulating committees. As a farewell, I would like to say a few words about how much our perception of reality has changed over time.

The Book of Genesis says that Abraham's family lived in Haran, which in ancient times was a centre for moon worship and human sacrifice, but God called Abraham out of Haran, away from moon worship.

Yet Abraham still felt that God was calling him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah. However when Abraham arrived on the mountain top he received a message from God telling him that human sacrifice was unnecessary.

Gradually the ancient world moved away from moon worship, until eventually the philosopher Aristotle declared that the moon was not a god but just a light moving round the sky.

Much later, in 1609, Galileo looked at the moon through a telescope and declared that the moon was a lump of rock with valleys and mountains like the earth. His findings shook the known world, and the disciplines of philosophy, science and religion became involved in a bitter war, the ripples of which we are still feeling today as we try to cope with an expanding universe. Galileo was proved right, 35 years ago when men landed on the moon and brought some of its rock back to earth. Humankind had taken a great emotional journey from "the moon is god" to "the moon is a light" to "the moon is made of rock".

Today, we are being called to make another emotional journey: this time caused by the knowledge gained when men first looked down a microscope.

The ancient world saw man as made of mud. The microscope reveals that man is made of cells, genes and hormones. We are trying to adjust to the world of genes which say, "You may be made in the image of God but you are also second cousin to a mouse."

In the past our idea of human reproduction was based on the presumption that the male had everything and that woman, apart from being the incubator, had no part in the process. NO says modern genetics, it is a 50-50 business. We can no longer talk about man alone, his seed, his children, his wife. We are gradually adjusting to more pluralistic ideas. God is showing us a world that allows us to deal with diversity. We still need to reconsider our understanding of the concept of personality, including sexuality, and this will involve careful re-analysis of what we mean by homosexuality - while adhering to the Christian ideal of marriage as a lifelong commitment of one man with one woman. Like Abraham we will need to listen to the One, who is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen. Perhaps it is time for the church to consider its attitude to modern genetic developments.

I have much pleasure in seconding the Report of the Marriage Council.