



**To: The Commission on the Marriage Canon**

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## **PREAMBLE**

It seems to take about a century for Anglicans to sort out challenges to prevailing sexual orthodoxies. The publication of *Remarks on the Proper Treatment of Polygamy* in 1855 by John Colenso, the Bishop of Natal, sent a tidal wave through the Anglican Communion that resulted—with a big push from the Canadian bishops—in the first Lambeth Conference. Resolution 26 of Lambeth 1988 finally settled the Church and Polygamy question. [<http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1988/1988-26.cfm>]

In 1908, contraception was seen as “demoralising to character and hostile to national welfare,” but by 1958 (only **half** a century later), the Conference believed that “the responsibility for deciding upon the number and frequency of children has been laid by God upon the consciences of parents everywhere.” Provisions for remarriage after divorce would take a while longer.

I have read through the roughly 140 submissions to the Commission to ensure that I was not offering you the fortieth iteration of argument #305.

The journey to this moment began in the run-up to the November 2011 Synod of the Diocese of Toronto. The LGBT group at Holy Trinity had joined with several other congregations in the diocese to draft a resolution to Synod asking the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada to amend Canon XXI to allow anyone who could

be legally married in Canada to be married in the Anglican Church of Canada. The motion was submitted and placed on the Synod Agenda.

## **THE LARGEST ANGLICAN SYNOD IN NORTH AMERICA SPEAKS**

The Synod leadership clearly hoped to scuttle the motion early in the debate with the usually foolproof parliamentary procedure of referring the matter to a committee for further consideration and study. For some reason, however—perhaps the decades the delegates in the room had already invested in discussion and study—the motion failed, and debate of the main motion continued.

My floor speech that day went like this:

"Many of the reforms in the history of the Church have been the result of reading the scriptures with fresh eyes, whether it was Martin Luther's insights in the 16th century or Latin-American liberation theologians in our own lifetime.

In the creation narrative, God gives the first humans radical freedom, a freedom that many believe to be an essential attribute of being created in the image of God.

In the second chapter of Genesis, we read that Yahweh concludes that "it is not right for the man to be alone," and proceeds to create a series of creatures that are presented to the man to name. "But no helper suitable for the man was found for him," the text says.

It is Adam--not God--who gets to decide WHO is a suitable companion. When God gets it right with the creation of Eve, Adam effusively approves. But let it be noted: that before the argument from anatomy for one-man-one-woman marriage--and before the argument from procreation, there was the argument from COMPANIONSHIP.

God trusted Adam to know WHO was a suitable companion.

So I have just one question to put before this Synod: "Why has the Church insisted on telling its members WHO constitutes a suitable companion for marriage, when EVEN GOD was unwilling to do so?"

After considerable further debate, the motion carried, and was memorialized to General Synod—and here we are.

## EPILOGUE

Many submissions to the Commission made reference to the sources of authority for Anglicans being scripture, reason, and tradition (with a priority usually placed on the authority of scripture). In 2003, as I was preparing remarks for a hearing during the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, I remember having an insight that forced me to look at Hooker's three-legged stool a bit differently. When one thinks about how our scriptures came to be, were they not the result of reason, tradition and human beings' experience of the divine over many generations, and shared and recorded as narrative, poetry, history, prophecy, letters, etc?

God's self-disclosure is progressive. The experience of God in the Exodus and Wilderness is different than the experience of God in the Apostolic era, and given Jesus' promise that his disciples were not yet ready for the whole truck-load of truth, they would need to trust the Holy Spirit to lead them into the truth that was yet to be revealed. Some are asking, how can we know that God's Spirit is in the midst of this movement to expand the definition of marriage? Well, for starters, by listening to the children of God who, like the persistent widow, have been banging on the door for so many years. And then, I would submit, trust the Rule of Gamaliel: if it is of God, history will provide the answer.