

Questions & Comments on the Proposed Change to Canon XXI

As National Director of the Anglican Communion Alliance, I would like to offer a few questions and comments.

Over the last twenty or thirty years, we have seen more and more conflict and division in the Anglican Church of Canada, most specifically over issues around sexuality. Many of our traditionally-minded brothers and sisters have left the Anglican Church of Canada and are now in the Anglican Network in Canada; however, *ACA is an organization and a voice for “loyal dissenters within the Anglican Church of Canada.”*

Our ACA motto, recently adopted, is “deepening Biblical faith in the Anglican Church of Canada.” One of the things that resonates with us is this theme’s clear implication that ACA is about addressing the issues *underlying* the various challenges we currently face; we also recognize that growing in Biblical faith and orthodoxy will challenge all of us in many areas of our lives.

And so we try to keep a positive focus in the work that we do. However, we also know that we are in a very serious situation in our Church with regard to the proposed change to the Marriage Canon, especially leading up to General Synod 2019 in Vancouver.

Many others have written excellent analyses of the theological and Scriptural matters at issue in this discussion. Instead, I would like to pose just a few questions and comments to those who favour this change.

1) Where are the new boundaries?

There has been much discussion about the possible change to the Canon, but sometimes it’s good to go back and re-read the actual Resolution. Its first section boldly proposes that we “Declare that Canon XXI (On Marriage in the Church) applies to all persons who are duly qualified by civil law to enter into marriage.” Can anyone, even anyone who favours same-sex marriage, deny that it may be problematic to tie our Church so tightly to what our government may decree in the future? This is not just a theoretical concern. There are already calls for legal provisions to be made for polyamorous relationships/families—with the Liberal government of Ontario having already opened the door to this with its Nov., 2017 Bill 28, the “All Families are Equal” act. (ARPA Canada provides a [good analysis of this development](#).) Just this week, a [Newfoundland judge ruled that all 3 parents in a polyamorous family are the legal parents to a child](#). It can hardly be denied any longer that these kinds of groupings are gaining cultural approval: see this recent [New York Times article on a teenage “throuple.”](#)

How will our Church respond to these shifts in the culture? If we are to accept that marriage is definable by us and that it should be shaped to accommodate erotic desire, then what will be down the road, especially as we consider our response to those who experience themselves as gender-fluid or bisexual? Having recently had occasion to look more deeply into the treatment of Scripture found in “This Holy Estate” (the document the Church produced as a rationale for same-sex marriage), the type of argumentation used in that document is distressingly compatible with further and

future expansions of marriage. This troubling fact will remain, even if the Resolution is amended at General Synod 2019 to at least limit the scope of its damage.

- 2) **Who invented marriage?** At a recent diocesan consultation, the idea was put forward that marriage is a human invention, with the implication being, I suppose, that since we invented it, we can re-invent it. In contrast to this, I believe that God instituted marriage for the good of the human family—not only for the good of Christians, but as a universal gift of grace. And while there have been variations (including polygamy) in some cultures at various times in history, marriage has always been male-female. This male-female duality is deeply embedded within the concept of marriage, and can't be extracted without damaging the concept itself. Furthermore, the trajectory of Christian/Biblical marriage has been away from other forms (such as polygamy) towards monogamous relationships between one man and one woman. For this reason, to my mind, it is not so much that we *shouldn't* marry 2 people of the same sex, but that we *cannot*. In order to have meaning, words and concepts (such as “marriage”) must have limitations and boundaries in terms of how they are used. N.T. Wright gives a very good analysis of this here: <http://www.anglicancommunionalliance.ca/resources/>.
- 3) “This Holy Estate” is the document the Church produced as a theological justification for proceeding with same-sex marriage in the Church. **Does the way Scripture is treated in that document sit well with you?** If not, I submit that “This Holy Estate” in fact makes a very strong argument *against* proceeding with a change to the Marriage Canon. Tasked with developing a case for marriage, it fails to do so, instead deconstructing the Biblical texts in a way that has neither spiritual nor scholarly integrity.
- 4) **Are we willing to trade the good news of the Gospel—God’s offer of radical forgiveness, regeneration and sanctification—for the accommodation of human desires, whether they belong to our experience or someone else’s?** Same-sex attraction is surely not the only difficulty that Christians face, nor will it be the final moral controversy our Church faces. Are we listening to [the brave voices of same-sex attracted believers](#) who, in submission to Christ, are striving to live in obedience and faithfulness--believers like Sam Allberry, who addresses the Church of England synod here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiSgM5uuk84?>

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission, and I close with the “Prayer for the Unity of All Christian People” (from the Book of Common Prayer):

O GOD the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all enmity and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--Submitted by Sharon Dewey Hetke