

## **THE GALILEE REPORT**

### **Primate's Theological Commission**

#### **The Role and Mandate of the Commission**

1. The General Synod 2007 asked the Primate to request the Primate's Theological Commission to consult with dioceses and parishes and to report in advance of General Synod 2010 on:
  - a) the theological question whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine.
  - b) Scripture's witness to the integrity of every human person and the question of the sanctity of human relationships.
2. The role and mandate of the Primate's Theological Commission is to assist the church in considering and incorporating foundational theological matters and reflection into its life and decision-making. In this document, the Commission seeks to present aspects of its work over the past two years in response to the questions posed by General Synod in 2007, to clarify what we see as some of the crucial areas of tension around foundational matters, and to offer back to the church some of the papers and work members have undertaken in the process of seeking clarification for ourselves.
3. The question of blessing same-sex unions brings out a multitude of different fears. We have fears about what will happen to the church. Some fear whether or not they can belong to a church that seeks to bless what they do not believe to be congruent with the gospel. Others fear whether or not they will be welcome in a church that rejects what they believe to be a gospel mandate. Yet it is critically important that those who stand on different sides of this question refrain from speaking to one another out of those places of fear. Is this even possible? The Commission members believe that study of this matter must be grounded in a practice of intentional prayer, hearing the Word together, and sharing in the sacraments (cf Solemn Declaration). It is only in such a setting that it might be possible to lay aside our fears. In having this conversation, we have learned that seeking to love God and love one another in this way can be painful: we are required to suspend our desire to hold onto what is comfortable for us in order to truly hear and be present to one another. We must be aware of the challenge of the gospel and the cost of discipleship in the painfulness of this endeavour. (I John 3:16-24, 4:7-21).
4. The experience of the Primate's Theological Commission has reflected, in many ways, that of the whole Church. We are not of one mind among ourselves. Deeply faithful and prayerful members, though following similar paths of enquiry, found themselves at very different conclusions. We also found ourselves in agreements that we could not

have anticipated, coming to that place by different paths. We found hope together in being at the table in prayer, in Bible Study and in searching conversations of critical fundamental questions.

5. To date we are not in a position to be able to present a single or consensus answer to the questions the Church has placed before us. The papers that follow share the breadth of our discussions. We recognize that none of the questions we examined are simply a matter of finding the right information (in Scripture, in tradition or in scientific knowledge), nor are they simply a matter of difference in how we do theology or approach the reading of Scripture or the use of scientific or other intellectual discoveries. We found it has been important to listen to and acknowledge the legitimacy and faithfulness of perspectives other than our own. For this reason the Commission recommends that all the papers be read, not just those most comfortable for the reader. This is not always easy nor without personal cost. We believe that the cost is part of what it means to participate in the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is embodied in the doctrine, sacraments, and discipline of the Anglican Church of Canada, and to share in the commitment of the framers of the 1893 Declaration that we would 'transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity'.

## **The Development of Doctrine**

6. In the history of the Church, the presenting issue in the development of doctrine is usually something that we experience as a new phenomenon, or something that we come to see in a new way. This is not a random process, but neither is it often an orderly one. In the life of the Church thinking and being often proceed together, or in response to each other, and often amid great tension.
7. The development of doctrine proceeds over different time spans and in different ways and places. We can identify certain stages in the process: the posing of a new question; the emergence of pastoral and theological responses, often in the form of innovation; a period of debate and testing involving many different parts of the Church (often over centuries); growing affirmation or doubt, accompanied by gradual reception, or at some point, a clear rejection. In Anglican understanding the Church can change its mind (Article XXI).
8. In the present case, within various parts of the church there are among us members who are in, or believe they are called to, committed, adult, monogamous, intended lifelong, same-sex relationships which include sexual intimacy<sup>1</sup>. This experience has become the presenting question around which a range of theological and ecclesial questions surge.

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is what the Commission intends to mean every time it uses the phrase 'same-sex unions'.

9. The Anglican Church of Canada is part of the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church'. Therefore, Anglican doctrine is in the first instance that teaching which is commonly shared with other Christian traditions. We count ourselves as those who have 'received the same faith from the apostles and are faithfully holding to it in loyalty to the One Lord incarnate who speaks in Scripture and bestows his grace in the sacraments', as recently stated by Archbishop Rowan Williams.
10. Doctrine is not sterile dogma; it is not a dead tradition of the Church. Because it is drawn from the revelation of God's self to the Church, and because God the Holy Spirit continues to lead the Church deeper into truth, doctrine is constantly renewed in its relevance and application. It is ever ancient and yet ever new. The dynamic of development may be said to take the form of a conversation, where the Church reflects upon its life and teaching of the past, bringing to it the questions and insights of the present. This act of engagement transforms both the Church and its perception of doctrine. New insights are achieved regarding received truths, and fresh promptings of the Spirit pose new questions and challenges to the Church to live into new expressions of discipleship.
11. It is clear to us that the doctrine of the universal church cannot be stretched to the point where it is unrecognizable as the Church's catholic teaching. A critical question facing the Church is what defines the DNA of the Church's doctrine. In other words, what keeps a doctrine true to itself in its essential teaching?
12. In the Anglican Church of Canada consideration of doctrine and its legitimate development historically begins with the Solemn Declaration. The Solemn Declaration declares:

We declare this Church to be, and desire that it shall continue, in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world, as an integral portion of the one Body of Christ composed of Churches which, united under the One Divine Head and in the fellowship of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, hold the one Faith revealed in Holy Writ, and defined in the Creeds as maintained by the undivided primitive Church in the undisputed Ecumenical Councils; receive the same Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as containing all things necessary to salvation; teach the same Word of God; partake of the same Divinely ordained Sacraments, through the ministry of the same Apostolic Orders, and worship one God and Father through the same Lord Jesus Christ by the same Holy and Divine Spirit Who is given to them that believe to guide them into all truth. And we are determined by the help of God to hold and maintain the Doctrine, Sacraments and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in His Holy Word, and as the Church of England hath received and set forth the same in "The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and

Ceremonies of the Church, according to the Use of the Church of England; together with the Psalter or Psalms of David pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches; and the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons”; and in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion; and to transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity.

13. The theological question of whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine is being tested in the community of the church drawing on Scripture, tradition and reason. In dialogue with these the church discerns whether this is congruent with what is known of God’s ways with God’s creatures, with what God has revealed in all that God has done, and with what we know of what God is calling us to be. It is by considering all these that the community evaluates whether this new thing is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine.
14. The interrelation of Scripture, tradition and reason is interwoven in all the work the Commission has shared, as are the doctrinal considerations identified in the St. Michael Report: salvation, incarnation, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, theological anthropology, sanctification, and holy matrimony. For this reason, some papers are referenced several times in what follows.
15. There is a vast amount written on these questions in relation to Scripture, tradition and new psychological and scientific perspectives. Much of this material can be referenced on both the national church website [www.anglican.ca](http://www.anglican.ca) and various diocesan websites.

## Scripture

16. The Commission began its work aware of this vast body of written material from a variety of perspectives addressing what many people consider the critical scriptural texts relating to the question of same-sex relationships (*list the passages*).
17. Members of the Commission recognize that the Church has always had different ways of reading Scripture, and that an important question has always been what range of interpretations we can live with on this, or any other topic. Different readings of Scripture can and will sometimes lead to different conclusions; those conclusions are always tested and brought into interaction in the life of the Church along with other criteria. Do they contribute to a faithful proclamation of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ? Do they tend toward holiness and goodness for individuals and communities? Do they build up the Body and enable the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of good works among us? Do they help us to remain faithful to the whole of the creeds with their affirmation of God’s work in creation, redemption and sanctification?

18. The work of the Commission includes elements of biblical reflection. How we draw on the Scriptures is not a matter of isolated Bible study. We ask questions and hear answers in Scripture in response to the various contexts in which we work.
19. The Commission identified two areas in which there seem to be important questions. One is the question of how we interpret the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments taken as a whole, and one member offers a lengthy account of his own experience and framework for reading the Scriptures and why it led him to certain ways of understanding today's question (*ref. Deller*). Another member offers a carefully considered reading of Romans 1, the New Testament passage generally considered central to other aspects of the theological conversation (*ref. Andrews*). Both documents, lengthy and challenging as they may be, offer valuable assistance in understanding how the whole of our Scriptures in different ways both frame and respond to doctrinal, moral and pastoral questions in the continuing life of the Church.

## Tradition

20. The tradition of the Church is not an abstraction separated from the ongoing life of the Church in its catholicity. We are always in the middle of it, shaped by it, and in turn shaping it. As an evangelizing church we welcome others into the fellowship of Christ's Body to participate with us in shaping and passing it to every new generation.
21. A critical question is how we assess the faithfulness of new developments in the tradition. Often these arise from the work of sharing the gospel in different cultural contexts, each of which asks questions of the tradition in its own unique way. Are there criteria by which we assess the developments? We offer here a helpful paper by a member who explored three very different accounts of how doctrine develops and evolves (*ref. Wang on criteria*). Some members have drawn on this work in subsequent papers as a helpful way to focus their own answers to the question of whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful and Spirit-led development of doctrine (*ref. Andrews and Jennings papers*). We note that these criteria are at work in various ways in most of the contributions by Commission members.
22. In the St Michael Report the Commission noted that same-sex blessings are analogous to marriage. The Commission spent considerable time exploring matters related to the understanding of Christian marriage, seeking to clarify their relationship to same-sex blessings, or same-sex marriage (which Canadian law now permits). Consequently the Commission identified two critical questions about the Tradition as central to the arguments against such the proposed development being faithful and Spirit-led: gender complementarity and procreation.
23. *Gender complementarity* There is a long history of reading Genesis 1-3 and Ephesians 5 in counterpoint with one another as pointing to the essential complementarity of male

and female in creation as central to the mystery of Christ and the Church. Combined with the adoption of the philosophical underpinnings of natural law<sup>2</sup> in the dominant strands of the theological tradition, this has led to the understanding that gender complementarity is foundational to the created order, and therefore foundational to all rightly ordered intimate human relationships. This question of complementarity relates to fundamental tensions between modern western culture(s) and many traditional cultures, including those of our own First-Nations and Inuit Anglicans, in which the genderedness of work and social structures are important aspects of identity and survival. Gender complementarity is now a matter of considerable debate. Two papers contributed to our deeper understanding of why this is so central for many Anglicans in this conversation (*ref. Thorne and Andrews*). Other members raise questions as to whether this understanding is (*ref. Jennings, Lebars, Deller*)

24. *Procreation*. Connected to this is a second, but equally important question for those who hold to a traditional view. Based on Genesis 1 and again drawing on natural law understandings, procreation is understood as a divinely ordered good in intimate human relationships and as a foundational element of Christian marriage. Others, based on a different reading of the witness of the Scriptures, offer an alternative account of procreation in relation to the good news announced in Christ and his Church. (*ref. Thorne, Andrews, Jennings*)
25. Where there is considerable consensus among Commission members, it is in relation to the grace conveyed in Christian marriage, including the gift of children, whether naturally conceived or through adoption. Our liturgies celebrate the gift and heritage of children as one important way in which the grace of God works in and through our lives. In their own right, covenant relationships such as marriage transform our lives and hopes, and call us into greater maturity and fullness in the life of Christ. (*ref Jennings on the Grace of Eros, rev., Howison*).
26. The Commission is also aware that the gospels (and many parts of the scriptural witness) subvert conventional understandings of marriage and family, both in their original context, in contemporary western society, and for that matter in all societies. Further we are aware that there was a strong tradition in the early church that singleness is normative for the Christian life, and that there is a need in our own time to explore this perspective further. (*ref Deller,, Thorne*)
27. The Commission was also asked to address the matter of the integrity of every human person and the sanctity of human relationships. Various members have offered reflections to assist us in considering this question. (*ref. Howison and Wang, Matthews on holiness, Thorne on friendship*).

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<sup>2</sup> That is, the way in which the observable existence of things in the world speaks to us about the purpose for which God intended them.

28. Beyond these specific matters the Commission is aware of deeper questions relating to how we draw on the tradition of the Church. How is our new experience like or unlike similar situations in Scripture and in the history of the Church? How does the very way we retell those moments in the history of God's faithful people shape our response from tradition? (*ref Deller, Lebens, Jennings, Moore*) How has the community addressed similar matters in the past? (*ref Thorne on friendship*) Are there different ways in which the Church has understood the role of tradition over time? (*Lebens tradition sheet also Tradition and authority, Deller on suicide and baptism*) How do questions ever arise in which the Church is being challenged to be more faithful? How do we discern the disconnection between our contemporary doctrine or practice and the model portrayed in the gospel narratives? Is the role of tradition principally cautionary or is it to enhance and enable life-giving teaching? Many of these questions lead us to another question; or lead us back to a deeper reconsideration of central aspects of the tradition, for example Scripture and the creeds.

## Reason and Discernment

29. It is clear that this change in the understanding of human sexual and intimate relations, both as a phenomenon of modern historical unfolding and scientific research (at least in European and North American culture) is one of the forces that press this question on the church as a matter. For some, it affects the credibility of the Gospel, and for others it raises questions about our faithfulness to the Gospel. The Commission understands its role as a theological commission to be one of assisting the church to bring to bear the resources and riches of our tradition into the conversation. So some members have offered papers which take up these shifts in knowledge in various ways (*Jennings, Deller on suicide, Moore, Nicholls*).

30. We are also aware that both our intellectual context and our cross-cultural reality in the life of the Church in Canada and around the world means that there are genuine and different ways in which groups and individuals reason and think. (*Lebens on theol method*) There are also deeply different ways in which genuinely faithful people imagine outcomes: for some the promise of the Gospel is the power of the Holy Spirit in all things to reshape our lives and to give us healing and wholeness through the visible transformation of fundamental drives and desires; for others the promise of the Gospel is that those very drives and desires be drawn and made whole by incorporation into the life-giving work of the Spirit in the Church.

31. At this point, the Commission can come to no shared single answer or discernment. What we do offer the church are some considered attempts to articulate what we understand to be the ways that, drawing thoughtfully on a range of resources of Scripture and Tradition, reasonable and faithful individuals reach different conclusions about the question (*Paul, Gary, Stephen*).

## Conclusion

32. We offer this back to our Church in hope, inviting its response and consideration. We trust that these documents in their limited way will help us all be drawn more deeply and faithfully in to the mystery of the life of Christ among us. We recognize that they will pose problems for some, answer questions for others, and raise questions for all. We hope that these questions will assist us all to bear the fruit of the Spirit.
33. "Now I know only in part, then I will know more fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13: 12-13) This is our prayer for our church as we all continue to wrestle with these questions.