

Being The Church of The Future: The Case for A Hermeneutics of Humility

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What kind of church do we want to be? What kind of people do we want to be? Can we collectively hear God's voice and respond to these questions?

The General Conference may have an opportunity to vote on a bill that removes the language currently found in the 2021 *Doctrine & Discipline* which says:

B. Same-Sex Marriage

1. The African Methodist Episcopal Church believes that marriage is ordained by God as set forth in the Holy Scriptures.
2. Further, the AME Church believes that unions of any kind between persons of the same sex or gender are contrary to the will of God.
3. Therefore, the AME Church strictly prohibits and forbids any AME Church clergyperson, licensed and/or ordained, from performing or participating in, or giving any blessing to any ceremony designed to result in any pairing between persons of the same-sex gender, including, but not limited to, marriage or civil unions.
 - a. Any AME Church clergyperson licensed and/or ordained charged with violating this rule shall be referred to the Ministerial Efficiency Committee.
 - b. If the charges are sustained, the bishop shall suspend the clergyperson and shall convene the Trial Committee within forty-five (45) days.
 - c. If the charges are sustained by the Trial Committee, such person's ordination shall be revoked by the Annual Conference and he or she shall be relieved of his or her orders and/or license.
4. Further, the AME Church strictly prohibits and forbids the use of any AME Church property for the performance of and/or the participation in and/or giving of any blessing on the same." (Part XVI. Section XV. B. (pages 376-377))

A YES vote will remove this language from the Discipline – along with the disproportionate punishments that could be directed toward clergy who violate the current prohibition.

A YES vote will NOT be a vote for same-sex marriage.

- **A YES vote will NOT** require AME clergy to perform marriages, civil unions, or any pairing between people of the same sex or gender.
- **A YES vote will NOT** require AME clergy to perform, participate in, or give blessings to *any* couple they have not discerned by Godly judgement to be suitable for marriage. This was the case before the current prohibition of pairing between persons of the same sex or gender was added to *The Doctrine & Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* in 2004.

A YES vote does NOT mean that you will have to marry, unite, pair, or bless any same-sex or same-gender couples. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you will have to attend any same-sex or same-gender marriages, unions, pairings, or blessings. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you approve of same-sex or same-gender marriages, unions, pairings, or blessings. **A YES vote does NOT** mean you affirm or approve of same-sex or same-gender relationships or homogenital intimacies. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you will or must be any more likely to consider an LGBTQ+ person for an appointment or a promotion. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you like any same-sex or same-gender loving people. **A YES vote does NOT** mean that you must be loving and kind to LGBTQ+ people – though we *should* all love and be kind to everyone. **A YES vote does NOT** require you to

recognize the marriage, union, pairing, or blessing of others any more than the secular government under whose jurisdiction you reside requires.

Passing this bill *will* be an indication that our Church – The AME Church – is willing to embrace *a hermeneutics of humility*, a method of interpretation and application of the scripture that honors the authority of the “The Holy Scriptures” without denying scientific knowledge, the development of human sociality, and the limitations of human wisdom and interpretative capacities.

A hermeneutics of humility does *not* deny God or the authority of God’s Word. *A hermeneutics of humility* *does* deny that we always understand God and the Word and apply our understanding perfectly – even the most learned, the most seasoned, the most pious, and the most certain of us.

STUDY. A hermeneutics of humility requires balanced study. Deeper study clarifies that there is no scriptural condemnation of homogenital sex as inherently immoral. It is improper and inconsistent for us to extrapolate appropriate contemporary attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people from the un/clean designations of Hebrew Bible holiness codes and debatable terms in the New Testament. It is improper and inconsistent for us to continue interpreting biblical texts that refer to “male and female” using exclusively binary sex and gender categories when we know, scientifically, that neither sex nor gender always fit in the male-female binary.

SERVICE. A hermeneutics of humility requires that we prioritize serving the least among us. Today, the least of the Lord’s siblings includes our LGBTQ+ siblings who have been made hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, incarcerated, strangers – and who are dying – among us because of *our* refusal to extend ourselves to “the least” with unconditional love, affirmation, and opportunities. AME LGBTQ+ siblings are not the *only* “least of these.” One of the most fundamental challenges facing the AME Church is the systemic bias against members of our Church born in Africa and in the Caribbean. Instead of daring to understand justice and equity for our members in districts 14 through 20 as integral to justice and equity for our LGBTQ+ members (and vice versa), we have bought into the lie that these particular demands for justice and equity are not only detached from one another but that justice and equity for members in districts 14 through 20 is in conflict with the justice and equity LGBTQ+ members of the church and their advocates seek. Sadly, there are leaders who wish to capitalize on this lie:

- Some will campaign, insisting that their opposition to LGBTQ+ people and practices is tantamount to their being *for* Africa or the Caribbean – as though there are no LGBTQ+ people in Africa or the Caribbean and no LGBTQ+ members in the AME Churches in these regions – and/or that our church has no responsibility to these people and members;
- Some leaders will demonstrate their support for our clergy, lay, and episcopal leaders from Africa and the Caribbean by attesting to the ways that governments in some African and Caribbean countries expect the AME Church to support campaigns against homogenital sex, but will offer little to no support for these same clergy, lay, and episcopal leaders from Africa and the Caribbean to exercise full self-determination and enjoy equitable connectional leadership opportunities.
- Some will insist that removing the requirement to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people seeking marriage can, will, and should result in the mass exodus of individual congregations or entire districts from the connection, but have done little to evangelize, contribute resources to, and/or grow the AME Church.

I challenge AMEs born in and/or serving in Africa and the Caribbean *and* LGBTQ+ AMEs – and *all* AMEs – to:

- Refuse to be pitted against one another as though there are no African and Caribbean LGBTQ+ AMEs – and as though AMEs who are African and Caribbean and AMEs who are LGBTQ+

have no common ecclesial interests (even when they are not also LGBTQ+ or African or Caribbean, respectively).

- Create conditions for us to dignify one another.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. A *hermeneutics of humility* requires acknowledgement of who we are. We are the *inkosi ygbatfazi* among the Zulu in Southern Africa; the *eshenga* of Namibia; the *mwaami* among the Ila of Southern Zambia and Zimbabwe; the *chibadi* of Zambia; the *nkhonsthana* of Mozambique; the *ndongo-techi-la* of the Congo and Sudan; the *ikihindu* of Burundi and Rwanda; the *mugawe* of the Meru people in Kenya; the *asbtime* in Ethiopia; the *gor-digen* and the *yauss* and *oubi* of the Wolof in Senegambia; ‘*Yan daudu*’ of Nigeria; the inheritors of the homoerotic traditions of the Akan and Ashanti people of Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Liberia; the *kbawal* of North Africa; the bisexuals, gays, lesbians, queers, and transgender people of African descent, the Blackqueers and Quares in and beyond Turtle Island, and the bonified, breddren, and bunnununu of Jamaica; and countless named and unnamed other gender-sexual minorities in Africa and its diaspora. We are all of this and more.

We are the AME Church *now* and of the future.