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**The Bishop's Bittersweet Day
Inclusion
By The Reverend Irene Monroe
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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It was a happy day when Bishop V. Gene Robinson celebrated his civil union with his partner, Mark Andrew, but it would have been happier if the Episcopal Church stood behind him.

The Reverend V. Gene Robinson said that he "always wanted to be a June bride." And this weekend he got hitched. Well, not quite.

In a private ceremony that took place five years to the day from when he was elected as the ninth bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire in the Episcopal Church, U.S.A., Robinson and his partner of 20 years, Mark Andrew, said "I do" in a civil union. And just as the news of the Church's first openly gay, noncelibate priest to be consecrated as bishop reverberated throughout the worldwide Anglican Communion half a decade ago, so too did the news of his civil union.

But for those of us who gathered this weekend at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Concord, N.H., we came to do what the celebrant (an officiant, to you non-churchgoing folk) asked of us: "to witness the joining of Gene and Mark in civil union and to do all in our power to support them in their commitment."

More than 120 of us were furtively lodged in suggested nearby hotels, where Robinson reserved blocks of rooms we accessed by using the secret code: "Bishop Robinson sent me." After the service we piled in our cars and drove 14 miles to the historic Canterbury Shaker Village for the reception. Security and media were present but the day went off without a glitch. But when Robinson returns from his honeymoon bliss, two pressing questions await him:

- 1) Why a June civil union just weeks before Lambeth Conference in July?
- 2) And, why a religious service following his civil union?

The tumultuous events surrounding the election and consecration of Robinson is the prism through which we see the Episcopal Church's longtime struggle and history with its LGBTQ community.

The Lambeth Conference, the once-a-decade gathering of archbishops and bishops united in Anglican brotherhood, has functioned as the Church's only white and only male club of heterosexual power brokers. The Conference has ignored, without moral compunction, its LGBTQ parishioners, and until recently the Anglican Communion's Global South - comprised mostly of Third World countries in Africa, South America, and Asia.

And Robinson said so in the *Concord Monitor* in November 2007: "I think [that] for a long time white men have ruled the world. With the emergence of people of color, the emergence of the women's movement, with the emergence of gay and lesbian folk standing up...I think it's a threat to the way things have always been with white men being in charge."

Robinson will not be seated at Lambeth next month, and all efforts to include him, even in a limited capacity, have failed because the more conservative wing of clerics gathering next month uphold the 1998 Lambeth Conference's controversial resolution stating homosexuality is contrary to the Church's teaching of Scripture.

But is it?

In the 1970s the argument for authority of Scripture came up with the ordination of women - and so too the threat of schism. But in 1989 the church consecrated its first female bishop - Barbara C. Harris. And conservatives were not only theologically outraged but also racially challenged because Harris is African-American.

And in 2006 gasps of both exhilaration and exasperation reverberated throughout the Anglican Communion when it was announced that Katharine Jefferts Schori would be the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A.

So I ask, what date in the worldwide Anglican Communion's calendar would be permissible for Robinson's civil union?

A blogger reading the headline in *Religion & Ethics* that stated: "Gay bishop, partner plan civil union," asked an equally important question: "If he is a bishop why should he have a civil union? Shouldn't he have a church wedding?"

Robinson's marginalization, however, is not only evident by his absence at this year's Lambeth Conference. His marginalization is also evident in this country's "separate and unequal" covenantal arrangements for LGBTQ Americans and also in his church's refusal to marry Andrew and him in a religious rite of blessing.

So why does Robinson bother to be a June bride?

In Robinson's new book, [*In the Eye of the Storm: Swept to the Center by God*](#), he answers the question.

"Our civil union will no doubt be reported by the press. I can't stop that. But I can rejoice that somewhere in Idaho or Ontario or Sussex there's a gay boy or a lesbian girl who will read about it and know that they too can aspire to a healthy, whole life with a person of the same sex - and that they don't have to give up their faith along the way. It might occur to them that they too can put their sexuality and their spirituality together in a way that makes for happiness and spiritual depth. Like me, they may have always dreamt of being a June bride. But unlike me, they will know it is possible."

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, the Rev. Irene Monroe is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. Reverend Monroe is the author of the **soon-to-be-released** [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not-So-Everyday Moments](#). Click on the above link to order now at pre-release pricing. As an African American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is irenemonroe.com. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

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