

INTEGRITY AND SANCTITY

A Consideration by the Primate's Theological Commission

THE PRIMATE'S THEOLOGICAL Commission has been asked to “consult with dioceses and parishes and to report in advance of General Synod 2010 on ... Scripture's witness to the integrity of every human person and the question of the sanctity of human relationships” (Act 61 GS 2007).

The phrase “the integrity of every human person” is problematic if by integrity we mean any of the most common understandings of the word: complete, whole, and self-contained; structurally sound and unbroken; possessing strong moral principles and high professional standards. In this sense, it is clearly *not* the case that every human person has integrity. We must therefore understand General Synod to use the term “integrity” in another sense: not as some quality we possess in ourselves, but as a sheer gift, conferred by grace, arising from our relationship with and dependence on God.

“Scripture's witness” is that God has created every human person in the image and likeness of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:26). Although the likeness of the human person to God has been lost through the wilful disobedience of humankind (Genesis 3), the image of God remains. This is what makes us long to recover our likeness with God, a likeness which is supernaturally restored in the waters of baptism. In the redeeming incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus, in his resurrection and ascension, and in the coming of his Spirit into our hearts, each person has the potential not only for integrity, but for the fullness of that humanity which is drawn into the life of God. Being incorporated into the body of Christ, the human person begins the life of the Spirit as a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). The Christian life then becomes a process of growing into an ever deeper holiness of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23) — and thus a fuller degree of integrity — through a life of obedience to the Divine Word, Jesus Christ.

With regard to “the question of the sanctity of human relationships,” it is likewise clearly not the case that every human relationship has “sanctity” — i.e., is holy. The “question” then must be: what gives a relationship sanctity / holiness? Again, sanctity is not a quality that our relationships possess in themselves; rather, a relationship grows into sanctity when it is given over to and taken up by God, who is holiness, and drawn into the life of God through the redeeming work of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The sanctity of human relationships is the joy of the presence of the Holy Spirit as each person, in adoration and obedience to Christ, honours Christ in the other (Ephesians 2:4–32; Philippians 2-3; Galatians 5:14–25).

This means that a relationship may have the potential for sanctity, but even a relationship that is specifically ordered toward the sanctification of its members is dependent upon whether or not they actively pursue holiness within that relationship. And since holiness consists in loving God, and loving God consists in doing God's will, a relationship will be holy only to the extent that its members are doing God's will.

In short, when we speak of the “integrity of every human person” and “the sanctity of human relationships,” we are speaking not of a quality inherent in ourselves, but of the destiny for which every human person was created — to become who we were made to be in Christ, in conformity to the will of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.