

Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon

The points of address suggested by the Commission quite rightly seek a discussion on a theology of marriage appropriate for the twenty-first century. It is not our intent to offer what must be simplified statements on a complex issue, but rather to express a hope that the Commission will address in a public way certain questions that seem fundamental to a decision on the resolution before the Church:

1/ We use the term 'Scripture' presumably because 'Scripture' implies an authoritative basis for appeal, whereas 'Bible' connotes a collection of writings. But on what grounds can Scripture in our generation be authoritative? As interpreters do we not necessarily sit in judgment on Scripture, each of us bringing our own presuppositions to our interpretation? In these circumstances how can Scripture speak effectively to our current problem? At the very least must not every appeal to Scripture be prefaced with a clear statement of the grounds on which and the extent to which it is regarded as authoritative?

2/ Somewhat surprisingly the Commission has not suggested a discussion of marriage in the tradition. In the literature of the Christian tradition how far is the sex/gender difference between man and woman seen as tangential and how far intrinsic to marriage?

3/ The resolution on marriage adopted by General Synod seems to be an attempt to address the important question of the church's responsibility to negotiate a relationship with what has become the status quo in the secular world. On the issue before us does the pattern of past Synodal decisions speak meaningfully to us ie on major social and ethical issues has the church generally conformed to popular opinion or has our position been one generally of challenging the popular will? If the former do we mean to say that the church is prophetic insofar as it recognizes and proclaims as truth patterns of behaviour originating in the secular mind? A doctrine of revelation seems to be in question, and the senses in which the church is a light to the world and the world a light to the church need to be articulated.

4/ We are told that this 'process of discernment' is taking place 'under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.' This may be an expression of pious rhetoric or of importance. If the latter, what are we to recognize as objective signs of the Spirit's guidance?

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