

To the General Synod Commission on The Marriage Canon:  
Submission regarding the amendment to the Marriage Canon XXI  
September 30, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The chief issue in this question of a proposed change in Church discipline and order in regard to Marriage for me is the one of authority. Do we recognize God's authority over us? How do we discern it? What does God demand of us and how do we trust him in Christ and follow by the guidance of his Holy Spirit?

Our Anglican formularies make it clear that *Christ* is our ultimate authority (as the Author of our life and our Redemption), and that we must trust him and follow him. As those same formularies attest he is chiefly revealed as "the Way the Truth and the Life" (John 14:8) in Holy Scripture. That revelation is guarded in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church down the ages, as lived under the authority of the same Scriptures and confessed in the Creeds. Therefore we have no authority of our own, as individuals (lay or ordained), or corporately (as Dioceses or Synods -- or even in General Councils, as the 39 Articles affirm) to go 'beyond' what God has revealed. We are all those "under authority" as the Centurion confessed to Christ, recognizing his own authority, and its limits, and the superiority of Christ's authority. (Matthew 8:8-9)

Much of our discussions have focused on changing times and attitudes in our contemporary world, especially in the Northern hemisphere and a concomitant critique of the cultural background and world-view of the Bible. We cannot 'know more' or 'better' than Jesus in his earthly ministry. Nor can we be more compassionate or merciful than he, "whose property is always to have mercy." We cannot presumptuously sit in judgment on the 'cultural limitations' of the New Testament (or any other previous) age, and assume our own has no blind spots. We are in danger of a temporal and cultural imperialism and an intellectual and spiritual hubris. In short we cannot depart from two millennia of unbroken traditional teaching based simply on the zeitgeist of the last few decades. A major shift in moral theology requires the highest tests of faithfulness. We dare not bring further division within the Anglican Communion or further distance ourselves from other Christian Communions, not to mention the consensus of the faithful from the ages of the Undivided Church. We are under orders from Our Lord to seek this Unity again, not to further fray our bonds of affection.

What does Our Lord require of us? To love **both** "grace and truth" as found in him (John 1:14); to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15); to love **all** of our neighbours with *his* love; to exercise maximum compassion with others as he has showered his on us. But we dare not compromise truth in the exercise of the love that comes only from him. Our authority -- to teach, to love -- is only in and under his mercy. He is the final judge of all, but we have no authority of our own to go beyond or around the clear sense of Scripture and the undivided teaching of the Church founded and rooted in the Revealed Truth of Scripture. The two Scriptural accounts cited below of Jesus dealing with occasions of sexual immorality can show us the way.

The case of the woman caught in adultery is often only *partially* recalled in these types of discussions. The most oft-quoted words are: "neither do I condemn you", Right after saying this, however, Jesus adds "Go, and sin no more." (John 8:11) He has mercy on the sinner, he does not condone or 'bless' her sin, and he calls her to repentance and new life.

In speaking with the Samaritan woman, Jesus says, "You have well-said, 'I have no husband' for you have had five husbands and the one whom you now have is not your husband." (John 4:17-18) Here Jesus does not gloss over the truth, but reaches deep into her heart and places a magisterial claim on her life, mercifully calling her to repentance and new life.

These encounters with the Living Word Incarnate illustrate the pattern for a full and authentic Christian compassionate approach to our human sinfulness. We acknowledge and challenge the sin (first, especially and foremost in ourselves) and then are called to newness of life in the grace of Christ. We all have (fallen) natural inclinations to various sinful behaviour; we are all sinners in need of a Redeemer. It is not being truly loving to any of us sinners for the Church to affirm or bless our sins and call them holiness. The burden of same-sex attraction for professing Christians is a terrible one, to be sure, and not to be despised or treated lightly or contemptuously. But we are not being truly loving to our brothers and sisters struggling to be faithful under those conditions by dealing with them in any other manner than that which upholds *both* love and truth. We cannot really be loving in anything less than truth; we cannot really be truthful in anything less than love.

These issues (at least in the ecclesial context) are not primarily matters of justice, but rather of love, and faithfulness to God and one another.

I thank the Commissioners for soliciting our input and assure you of my prayers that we may all be found faithful witnesses to both God's love and his truth.

Under the Mercy,

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