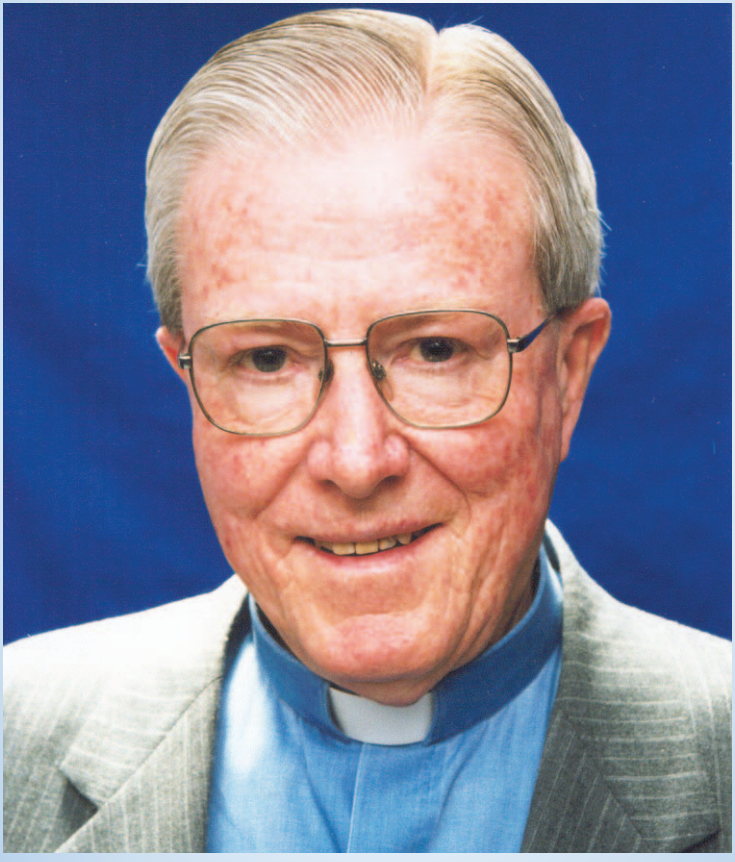
The 2015 Synod
The Crucial Questions:
Divorce and Homosexuality



Geoffrey James Robinson

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To the victims of abuse, the divorced, the homosexuals,
to all women, and to all others
within the Catholic Church who have not been treated
as Jesus would have treated them.

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Prologue 2

1. When is Sex Natural? 11

2. Divorce and Remarriage 27

3. The Development of Doctrine 61

Epilogue 71

Biblical Index 72

INTRODUCTION

The recent session of the Synod of Bishops (October 2014) sought to look at the modern family through a pastoral lens, so it had a particular concern for situations where there seemed to be a conflict between Church doctrine and pastoral need. Two subjects rose to prominence.

One concerns the situation of Catholic persons who have grown up to discover that their natural sexual attraction is as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender persons. The doctrine is that any sexual act other than one between a man and a woman within marriage and open to procreation is disordered and mortally sinful. The pastoral need is that heterosexual marriage is not an alternative for such people and yet they feel not the slightest call to the life of total celibacy that this teaching would demand of them under pain of eternal punishment.

The other concerns the plight of Catholics whose marriage has failed and who have later remarried. The doctrine is that marriage is indissoluble, so the couple are held to be living in an ongoing and mortally sinful situation. The pastoral need is that such people feel that they are permanently excluded from Communion and the Church.

Many speakers at the Synod tried to find pastoral solutions within the doctrinal teaching, but it must be said that they did not have much success. Some strenuously opposed such attempts, insisting on the full rigour of the teaching.

It seemed to me that the majority were entirely genuine in their concern to meet the pastoral need, but believed that any pastoral solution had to be within the strict bounds of the doctrinal teaching, and did not really know where to go.

I suggest that if the second session of the Synod in October 2015 is to find answers, it must first look seriously at the Church teachings involved to see whether they might allow some 'room to move' in finding pastoral solutions. That is what I shall seek to do here. I am not seeking to impose one understanding, but to show that there is more to these two subjects than can be contained in the current stark teaching of the Church.

Allow me first, in a prologue, to give a brief context.

Prologue

1

A God of Infinite Patience

Science tells me that the world began with a Big Bang;
faith tells me that this Big Bang was an explosion of God's love.

I cannot offer scientific proof of this faith belief,
but it is the most satisfying explanation I can find
of all that I see around me,
both in the material universe and within my own heart and mind.

At first vast amounts of energy swirled in the cosmos,
and then, over immense periods of time,
more solid objects began to form,
as stars, planets and galaxies came into being.
This world had its great beauty and majesty,
but there was no thinking and feeling being there
that could respond to the love that had created it.

More billions of years passed,
until on the planet we inhabit
the first primitive life forms came into being,
then crawled out of the sea and began to colonise the land.

An extraordinary and beautiful variety of plants and
animals developed,
but there was still no being that could consciously respond to
God's love.

At last a few animals began to stand upright on two feet
and develop their conscious lives.
Human beings slowly evolved who could think and feel
and, finally, respond to God's love.

From the explosion of love in the Big Bang
to the first conscious response to God's love
had taken the scarcely imaginable time of 13.8 billion years,
and over all that time God had
waited . . . and waited . . . and waited,
not interfering, but,
with infinite patience,
allowing things to develop at their own pace.

There were many attempts by human beings
to understand the origin and meaning of this world,
though the earliest attempts usually involved nothing more
than stories of warring gods and superhuman heroes.

Then the people of Israel came to believe in one God
and they developed and wrote down a story of their moral and
spiritual journey.
The journey began with ideas of superiority and vengeance
(Gen 4:17–24),
but then gradually rose to ideas of respect for the dignity of others
and the rights that flow from this dignity (Ex 20:1–17),
and from there to ideas of loving one's neighbour as one loves
oneself (Lev 19:18),
and even to loving as God loves (Deut 6:4–9; Jonah 4:9–11).