

The Church against the Divorce Bill

Before the burning issue of the RH Bill has found closure, another controversial bill has put the churches again at the center of heated discussion. This is the Divorce Bill.

It is said that the Philippines and the Vatican are the only two remaining states in the world that do not have a Divorce Bill. This is why the Bill is vehemently opposed by the Roman Catholic Church in the country. But nowadays, proponents of the Bill are more vocal, driven by the growing number of ailing marriages in the country. The marital unfaithfulness, abuse, exploitation and other issues that threaten the quality of life, and sometimes life itself, are seen as strong bases for a Divorce Bill. The current family and civil code have been judged irrelevant and impotent in addressing the challenges that today's couples face.

The issue of divorce has been around since ancient times. From the Old Testament, we find that in Jewish society, divorce was presumed and accepted. The Law of Moses contains specific provisions on divorce to ensure the well-being of the couples who must go through it. During the time of Christ, the religious leaders of their day were divided in their interpretation of the law on divorce. For some, unchastity justified divorce; for others, a spoiled dish or "finding another fairer" was reason enough to cast a wife aside.

These sharp differences in interpretation were used by the Pharisees to test Jesus' moral authority in interpreting the Law of Moses. In Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus was asked when it was proper for a man to divorce his wife and on what grounds. However Jesus refused to enter the debate. Instead, he affirmed God's original plan for marriage and emphasized that it remains God's ideal for all marriages. By doing so, he raised the level of ethics and morality to a higher plane. For him, God's original plan is a lifelong and monogamous marriage. Jesus allowed divorce only on the single ground of "sexual immorality".

But included in Jesus' reply was the sharp rebuke that it was the "hardness of people's heart" that provided a place for divorce in their laws. We too should ask why we have sunk so low as to consider divorce the only resort to issues such as escalating marital-related violence. The truth is that the real fight of the Church is not with legislators who are proposing the Divorce Bill. The real fight is in the arena of men's hearts. The Bill may try to address the symptoms of deteriorating marriages, but the church should fight the root cause of those symptoms — "the hardened heart of people."

With or without the Divorce Bill, the Church will have to do its vital role of witnessing to the Bible's call for sacrificial love, strengthening relationships, and disciplining the next generation towards a higher view of marriage.

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