

Supplementary Material to Sessions Three and Four

Notes mainly for the Convenor of the group, that may aid discussion

1.

There are many Biblical references to be looked up, read and talked over, with the aim that all should become familiar with the foundation documents of the faith. But there may arise objections to so much reliance on the Bible, e.g.

■ “All this is out of date. We have the Holy Spirit who, Jesus said, would lead us into all truth. Much has changed since Jesus’ day, so we don’t have to read what he said. We have to listen to what the Spirit is saying now.”

This raises questions for the objectors to answer: Who is Jesus, to be so easily dismissed? Can the Son and the Spirit say different things, so dividing God against himself? How do you know that “the Spirit” you claim to hear is the Spirit of God?

■ “The Bible, especially the OT, is primitive and barbaric. If it says that only men can be priests, it also says that women must be stoned for adultery. It’s time we dropped it.”

Answer: The Bible is the history of our salvation. The OT shows God leading a primitive and barbaric people through a long and painful education, until they realise that they are morally corrupt and in need of a Saviour. As Christians, we have accepted the Saviour, Jesus, and are continuing our education with him and in him, in the Church. So the whole Bible speaks to the human condition, and is in fact the history of each one of us – from the barbaric to the heights of the moral law to redemption and sanctification. It should be our most prized possession.

■ The Bible was written by men. Research shows that in the early Church there were women priests and Bishops. Men suppressed them.”

Answer: You can’t have it both ways! The fact is that the pattern of the Church as we have it in the NT prevailed over other ideas. If the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth, how can you attribute the NT model to men, and all other ideas, which did not prosper, to the Holy Spirit?

2.

The reference to Julian of Norwich at the beginning of Session Three may give rise to assertions about this lady mystic, e.g.

■ “Julian said that Christ is our Mother. She brought out the feminine side of God.”

Answer: We don’t know whether God has a feminine side. We only know, in this life, that for the purpose of our salvation God has chosen to reveal himself to us as Father, through God the Son.

■ If Julian did say that Christ is our Mother, does her word carry more weight and authority than the message of the Son of God himself?

■ Actually, Julian exhorts us to turn to “Holy Church, and find there our beloved Mother.” She also records that Jesus told her, “All the good that is done for you in Holy Church, it is I.” In other words, all the benefits that are ours through the Church add up to the one word ‘Jesus’. Thus, in Julian’s ecstatic “logic”, if the Church is Jesus, and the Church is our Mother, therefore Jesus is our Mother. However, Julian is clear headed enough to refer always to Jesus as “he, him, my lord”. So she has no illusions about a feminine God.